



Book of Recommendations of National Convention for European Integration 2025



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Introduction

Albania's path toward European Union (EU) membership continues to unfold through steady yet demanding steps, reflecting both significant achievements and persistent challenges. Since applying in 2009 and attaining candidate status in 2014, Albania has advanced its alignment with the EU acquis through reforms in governance, rule of law, and institutional modernization. A major turning point was reached on 15 October 2024, when the Second Intergovernmental Conference in Luxembourg officially launched accession negotiations on Cluster I – Fundamentals, the core of the enlargement process. This development followed the successful completion of the screening process in 2023 and affirmed Albania's determination to advance toward full EU membership.

Cluster I, which encompasses the most politically sensitive and demanding areas of accession, places Albania's judiciary, public administration, and democratic institutions at the center of scrutiny. Within this framework, Chapters 23 (Judiciary and Fundamental Rights) and 24 (Justice, Freedom and Security) remain decisive, with interim benchmarks focusing on judicial vetting, clearing case backlogs, strengthening anti-corruption mechanisms, and ensuring safeguards for fundamental rights. Chapter 5 (Public Procurement), alongside Chapters 18 (Statistics) and 32 (Financial Control), has been assigned provisional closing benchmarks, underscoring the EU's close monitoring of transparency, accountability, and the integrity of state institutions.

By 2025, Albania has also expanded negotiations beyond Cluster I, with discussions progressing across multiple chapters grouped within other clusters of the accession framework. This reflects a growing confidence among EU member states in Albania's reform trajectory, while also highlighting the demanding nature of the benchmarks that must be fulfilled before any provisional closure. The emphasis remains clear: progress is conditional, measurable, and dependent on tangible results in the rule of law and governance. Equally important is the recognition that reforms cannot succeed in isolation. Albania's EU path requires the inclusive engagement of government institutions, the judiciary, civil society, the private sector, and international partners. Broader societal participation ensures that reforms are not only formally adopted but also embedded in practice, reflecting the aspirations and needs of citizens.

Beyond documenting the milestones of Albania's EU accession process, this Book of Recommendations 2025 serves as a practical and analytical guide for understanding the country's reform trajectory in relation to the acquis. It is designed not merely as a catalogue of recommendations but as a framework that connects sector-specific reforms to the broader integration agenda, showing how progress in individual chapters contributes to Albania's overall path toward membership. The book is structured into three core sections, each dedicated to a pivotal chapter under negotiation: Chapter 5 – Public Procurement, Chapter 23 – Judiciary and Fundamental Rights, and Chapter 24 – Justice, Freedom and Security.

Introduction

Each section begins with an overview of the current state of reforms, highlighting both achievements and persisting challenges, and situates these within the negotiation framework and benchmarks assigned by the European Commission. It then examines the legal and institutional foundations in place, alongside policy initiatives, strategic documents, and compliance gaps, to provide a comprehensive picture of alignment with EU standards. The heart of each section is the synthesis of expert roundtable discussions, where practitioners, policymakers, and civil society actors contributed concrete recommendations tailored to the Albanian context. These recommendations are not presented in isolation; rather, they are contextualised within the EU accession logic, ensuring their relevance for both domestic stakeholders and EU interlocutors. By combining descriptive analysis, institutional mapping, and policy-oriented recommendations, the book aims to be simultaneously a resource for practitioners implementing reforms, a reference for EU institutions evaluating Albania's progress, and an analytical tool for scholars and observers seeking to understand the interplay between domestic reforms and EU conditionality.

CHAPTER 23 – JUDICIARY AND FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS

POLICY STRATEGY

EU policies within Chapter 23 – Judiciary and Fundamental Rights include the promotion and implementation of the Union’s founding values of the rule of law and respect for human rights. Paramount in this context is the establishment of an effective judicial system that is independent, high-quality, and efficient, as well as the development of a credible and sustainable track record in the fight against corruption. The content of Chapter 23 is concentrated on three interrelated fields: the judiciary, anti-corruption, and fundamental rights.

Within the process of EU accession negotiations, the acquis chapters have, under the New Enlargement Methodology adopted in 2020, been grouped into six thematic clusters. This reorganisation was designed to create stronger policy synergies and foster a cross-sectoral approach to reforms. Chapter 23 is placed at the core of Cluster 1 – Fundamentals, together with Chapters 24 (Justice, Freedom and Security), 5 (Public Procurement), 18 (Statistics), and 32 (Financial Control). As such, it represents one of the most sensitive and determinative areas of accession negotiations, given that progress in the Fundamentals directly conditions the advancement of negotiations in other clusters.

The opening of accession talks in July 2022 represented a historic milestone for Albania, followed by the screening process for all chapters, which began in September 2022 and concluded in November 2023. For Chapter 23, the explanatory meeting was held on 27 September 2022, during which the European Commission presented the acquis requirements, followed by the bilateral screening meetings on 24–25 November 2022, where Albanian institutions outlined their legal and institutional framework, planned reforms, and identified capacity-building needs. Following the completion of the screening, the European Commission delivered the screening report for Cluster 1 July 2023, providing an overview of Albania’s alignment, its gaps, and specific recommendations for the way forward.

The year 2024 brought another milestone, with the Second Intergovernmental Conference (IGC) convened in Luxembourg on 15 October, which formally marked the opening of negotiations on Cluster 1. The IGC highlighted the centrality of Chapter 23, not only as part of the Fundamentals but as the test of Albania’s accession trajectory. The Commission and Member States agreed on a set of 14 interim benchmarks to be fulfilled before the chapter can move toward provisional closure, which are divided into 4 benchmarks for the judiciary and justice reform, 3 benchmarks for the fight against corruption and 7 benchmarks for the protection and promotion of human rights [1].

[1] EU Common Position - Cluster 1: Fundamentals. Brussels, 11 October 2024, pg. 20.

<https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/AD-18-2024-INIT/en/pdf>

CHAPTER 23 – JUDICIARY AND FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS

POLICY STRATEGY

These benchmarks require Albania to consolidate the justice reform by completing the vetting of judges and prosecutors under international monitoring, strengthening post-vetting accountability mechanisms, reducing the backlog of judicial evaluations, and improving the quality and efficiency of the courts through the expansion of the Integrated Case Management System and the promotion of alternative dispute resolution. They also require Albania to establish a solid track record of high-level corruption convictions, strengthen the operational capacities of SPAK and the NBI, implement outstanding GRECO recommendations, and ensure systematic verification of asset declarations. On fundamental rights, the benchmarks cover the adoption and implementation of the data protection reform, the safeguarding of media freedom and safety of journalists, the strengthening of equality bodies, effective protection from discrimination and gender-based violence, reinforcement of child protection systems, decisive progress on property rights digitalisation and enforcement of court rulings, implementation of minority rights bylaws, and further alignment with EU acquis on citizenship [2].

From the perspective of the strategic framework, Albania remains guided by the Cross-Cutting Justice Strategy 2021–2025, now entering its final year of implementation. The new Cross-cutting Justice Strategy for 2025–2030 intends to build upon the lessons of the vetting process and address outstanding gaps in efficiency and professionalism. In the area of anti-corruption, the Cross-Sector Anti-Corruption Strategy 2015–2023 expired at the end of 2023, and in late 2024 the government adopted the new Anti-Corruption Strategy 2024–2030 and Action Plan 2024–2026, reflecting EU priorities and GRECO recommendations. In the field of equality and human rights, the National Strategy for Gender Equality 2021–2030 and its action plan continue to guide reforms, albeit with shortcomings in implementation. The LGBTIQ National Action Plan 2021–2027 remains largely unfulfilled, while a new Strategy for the Protection of Crime Victims 2024–2030 has been adopted. These frameworks illustrate the government’s stated commitment to reform, yet their effectiveness will depend on consistent application, adequate resourcing, and measurable results on the ground.

Overall, the developments of 2024–2025 reaffirm the centrality of Chapter 23 in Albania’s EU integration process. The interim benchmarks set by the EU provide a clear but demanding roadmap, requiring Albania to demonstrate tangible improvements in judicial independence, efficiency, accountability, and integrity, alongside concrete progress in anti-corruption efforts and the protection of fundamental rights. Success in this chapter will not only unlock further progress in Cluster 1 but will also determine the credibility of Albania’s accession path as a whole.

[2] EU Common Position - Cluster 1: Fundamentals. Brussels, 11 October 2024, pg. 20.
<https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/AD-18-2024-INIT/en/pdf>

SNAPSHOT OF EC ASSESSMENT FOR ALBANIA – CHAPTER 23

Functioning of the judiciary[3]. - Albania is between having a moderate and a good level of preparation. A new Cross-Sector Justice Strategy for 2024-2030 was adopted but implementation still needs to be improved such as the quality of statistical data that remains poor. The efficiency of HJC and HPC in appointing, promoting, transferring and evaluating magistrates remains very low. While the judiciary's resilience has improved, attempts by public officials and politicians to exert undue interference and pressure have increased, raising serious concerns, notably the unprecedented reactions and pressure from the executive and legislative branches against SPAK and the HJI. The vetting process for all judges and prosecutors was finalised in first instance, further strengthening judicial independence and accountability. Vetting procedures on appeal have increased in pace and are now on track to meet the constitutional deadline of June 2026. The HJC has proceeded with new appointments of magistrates, contributing to a reduction of vacancies at first instance level but challenges remain with the appointment of non-magistrate members to the Councils and the quality of performance evaluations. Legislation still needs to be adopted to ban vetted-out magistrates or magistrates with a 15-year ban from high judicial office from taking up positions as training staff at the School for Magistrates. Sufficient budget was allocated to develop a modern, integrated, electronic case management system, but full establishment is currently foreseen only for 2030. Albania has made some progress during the reporting period. Sustained reform efforts are needed to continue to strengthen the judicial system and maintain high standards of integrity after the completion of the vetting process. As of 1 October 2025 the final decisions resulted in 426 dismissals and terminations (52.9% of cases), and 321 confirmations in office (39.9% of cases). 53 appeals remain pending. The International Monitoring Operation (IMO) issued 42 recommendations for appeal and eight dissenting opinions against Appeal Chamber decisions. The High Judicial Council has appointed 42 new judges in first instance courts of general jurisdiction. The HJC finalised forty-one evaluation reports and the HPC forty. Quotas determined by the HJC and the HPC for the School of Magistrates for the 2025-2028 class are an additional concern as they are largely insufficient to ensure that in the medium term, the needs of the system will be gradually addressed. An electronic communication tool between the Tirana District Court and lawyers has been successfully piloted. However, the lack of funding to expand it to all courts, especially the General Appeal Court, is limiting its full potential to improve access to justice.

Fight against corruption[4].- Albania remains moderately prepared in the fight against corruption. SPAK continued to consolidate its institutional capacity and improve coordination with NBI and special courts. However, the number of referrals to SPAK from other authorities needs to increase. Other bodies tasked with fighting corruption: the General Prosecution Office and the state police, still need to improve their results in fighting corruption. Despite efforts, the state police remain highly vulnerable to corruption. Following the resignation of the General Director in July, the appointment procedure for the new Head of Police Oversight Agency needs to be conducted in line with the highest principles of merit, competitiveness and transparency.

[3] European Commission's Report - Albania 2025, Brussels, 4 November 2025, pg. 27.

https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/fe9138b7-90fe-4277-a12c-3a03f6d1957f_en?filename=albania-report-2025.pdf

[4] Ibid, pg. 31.

The position of Minister of State for Anti-Corruption and Public Administration has been maintained in the new executive. GDAC's staff are still limited to approximately 30 employees, supported by anti-corruption coordinators deployed across about 20 institutions. Effectiveness and transparency of verifications of declarations of assets and interests by HIDAACI, including high-risk profiling, needs to be increased. The declarations of assets need to be made public online, in line with legal requirements. Albania made some progress in the fight against corruption. The track record has improved for high-level cases and slightly deteriorated for non-high-level ones. In 2024, the SPAK Appeal Court issued 24 final convictions involving 106 individuals, including 13 high-level cases, while the First Instance Court convicted 93 others. The legal framework is broadly in place but needs improvement on preventive measures. Albania adopted the Anti-Corruption Strategy 2024–2030, and SPAK adopted a Backlog Reduction Strategy 2025–2027, contributing to the Cross-sector Justice Strategy and the National Strategy Against Organised Crime. However, further strengthening of institutional capacities, planning, coordination and monitoring remains needed. Public officials' awareness of ethical standards and the implementation of integrity plans remains weak. In March 2025, GRECO concluded that 18 out of 24 recommendations had been satisfactorily addressed.

Fundamental Rights[5].- Albania's legal framework sets out a generally good basis for the protection of fundamental rights. The country has not signed the Optional Protocol to the International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. On 1 January 2025, Albania had 25 leading ECtHR judgments pending implementation, notably Strazimiri v. Albania and Sharxhi and others v. Albania. Parliament has yet to reappoint an Ombudsperson and a Commissioner against Discrimination, as the mandates of the current heads expired in 2022 and 2023, which risks seriously weakening their legitimacy. Albania's action plan to address the main findings and recommendations of the CPT needs to be implemented. No steps have been taken to address serious concerns over the conditions for prisoners with mental health issues and forensic patients. Overcrowding, a lack of medical and therapeutic staff, and inadequate facilities remain serious concerns. The use of electronic monitoring has been suspended since 2017 and needs to be reintroduced urgently. The legal framework for the protection of personal data is adequate but the capacities of the Data Protection Agency still need to be improved. Progress during the reporting period included completion of the fourth Universal Periodic Review, supporting 239 out of 253 recommendations, and continued to benefit from its observer status at FRA. Albania continues to ensure good cooperation with the ECtHR. There are currently 10 cases under enhanced supervision by the Committee of Ministers (compared to 16 in 2024). The Ombudsperson (People's Advocate) continued to exercise its mandate satisfactorily. It has been accredited at global level as an A-status National Human Rights Institution (NHRI) since 2014. The largest number of complaints received by the Ombudsperson in 2024 concerned the limitation of personal freedom (295 complaints, 16% overall). The functioning of the National Preventive Mechanism remained satisfactory; however, the follow-up of its recommendations is low. Corruption, poor healthcare and a shortage of staff in the penitentiary system and detention centres remain a concern. The Data Protection Commissioner is systematically consulted on draft legislation that can affect personal data, and its recommendations are broadly followed by public and private data controllers.

[5] European Commission's Report - Albania 2025, Brussels, 4 November 2025, pg. 33.

https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/fe9138b7-90fe-4277-a12c-3a03f6d1957f_en?filename=albania-report-2025.pdf

Freedom of Expression[6].- Albania is between having some and a moderate level of preparation in the area of freedom of expression. The framework for the protection of journalists is in place, but verbal and physical attacks, smear campaigns and SLAPP targeting journalists continued. In October 2024, the General Prosecutor's Office appointed a media adviser as the contact person for reporting and following up on cases of attacks against journalists and media workers. A point of contact for the safety of journalists was established both at the Ministry of Interior and the police. A structured dialogue between Albanian institutions and media actors was launched in January 2025 with the aim of discussing key legislative and regulatory reforms to enhance freedom of expression, including media freedom and pluralism. The ad hoc parliamentary committee on tackling disinformation and foreign interference drafted the country's first National Strategy against foreign interference and disinformation, adopted by Parliament in July 2025. Procedural irregularities in the election process for a new Director-General of RTSH in January 2025 further undermined the principles of merit-based selection and increased concerns over the independence of RTSH. In April 2024, the AMA started publishing on its website summarised information on ownership structures and beneficial owners of licensed audiovisual media. Albania made limited progress during the reporting period. Media freedom organisations denounced 45 cases of violations of journalists' safety in 2024. In April 2025, the Constitutional Court issued a decision in favour of a journalist, annulling previous judicial rulings that had authorised the seizure of the journalist's electronic devices, data and materials. Of the 365 complaints received by the Commissioner for the Right to Information and Personal Data Protection in 2024, 283 cases were resolved. In March 2025, the government suspended access to a major social media platform; it is now accessible following an agreement to ensure filters for hate speech. Several cyberattacks against the media took place during the reporting period.

Gender Equality/Non-discrimination[7].- The legal and institutional framework for gender equality is partially in place, but legislative alignment with the EU acquis as well as implementation and enforcement need to be improved. Weaknesses remain in implementing the National Strategy for Gender Equality 2021-2030 and its Action Plan. Women living in rural and remote areas, Roma and Egyptian women, and LGBTIQ persons continue to face multiple forms of discrimination. The activities in preparing Local Gender Action Plans continued. In 2024, the Commissioner for Protection against Discrimination (CPD) handled twelve cases of hate speech, confirming hate speech in two of the cases. From January to June 2025, the CPD handled eleven new cases, which are under review. Albania still does not have legislation recognising civil cohabitation, same-sex marriage, parenthood by same-sex couples, or legal gender recognition. The medical protocol for transgender and gender-diverse persons has not been adopted yet. Most of the measures under the LGBTIQ National Action Plan 2021-2027 have not been implemented due to lack of resources and lack of political will. The legal and institutional framework on rights of the child is partially in place, and implementation needs to be improved. Only 62% of the measures in the National Agenda on the Rights of the Child (NARC) 2021-2026 had been fully implemented. Despite the National Social Protection Strategy 2024-2030 and Social Inclusion Policy 2024-2028, 70% of children remain at risk of poverty.

[6] European Commission's Report - Albania 2025, Brussels, 4 November 2025, pg. 36.

https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/fe9138b7-90fe-4277-a12c-3a03f6d1957f_en?filename=albania-report-2025.pdf

[7] Ibid, pg. 36.

The State Committee on National Minorities also requires adequate resources and reviewed procedures for selecting its members. Implementation of the National Action Plan for equality, inclusion and participation of Roma and Egyptians in Albania (2021-2025) and the Poznan commitments needs significant improvement. The legal framework for gender-based violence is not fully aligned with the Istanbul Convention. Violence against women and girls and domestic violence remain a pressing issue. Laws on hate speech are in line with European standards; however, better enforcement capacity and awareness-raising are needed. No progress was made on child-friendly justice. Laws to protect minors from child marriage are generally ineffective or applied inconsistently. Albania's framework legislation on the rights of persons with disabilities is only partially compliant with UNCRPD, and Albania has not yet ratified the Optional Protocol to the UNCRPD. Several key laws are being revised, including the Law on gender equality, the Criminal Code, and the Family Code concerning child marriages. A total of seven cases of hate crime were reported to the police in 2024 and eight from January to June 2025. There was no progress from the 2024 report in addressing remaining issues related to the procedural rights of suspects and accused persons, including elements pertaining to the right to information in criminal proceedings, access to a lawyer and presumption of innocence. There has been poor implementation of the national action plan for equality, inclusion, and participation of Roma and Egyptians, as well as the Poznan commitments.

FUTURE MEASURES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This section highlights the convened DCTs and recommendations provided within the National Convention on European Integration, in synergy with the Partnership Platform for European Integration pursuant to Prime Minister's Order no. 113, dated 30.08.2019 "On the forms of participation, functioning and institutional structure of the Partnership Platform for European Integration". The Ministry of Justice is the leading institution for Chapter 23 – Judiciary and Fundamental Rights, and as such some of the roundtables were held in close collaboration with its representatives. In addition, some roundtables were conducted in partnership with institutions including the School of Magistrates and the Commissioner for the Right to Information and Personal Data Protection. During the roundtables, members of this DCTs have been present along other stakeholders who contribute and possess expertise on the specific issues discussed on each roundtable.

Roundtable for Chapter 23 – Institutional Engagement and Coordination, and the Contribution of Civil Society in the context of the Chapter 23 negotiations, 06 March 2025

The opening of negotiations for Chapter 1 – Fundamentals has intensified the work and monitoring of policies and reforms, which the European Union has also defined interim benchmarks for Chapters 23 and 24. For Chapter 23, priorities have been set, divided into three main subfields of the chapter: four benchmarks for the judiciary and justice reform, three benchmarks for the fight against corruption, and seven benchmarks for the protection and promotion of human rights. Meanwhile, reporting and monitoring work between Albania and the EU continues, and within the framework of the new Growth Plan for the Western Balkans, the subfield of fundamentals and the rule of law is part of this agenda and has been prepared as opening criteria. This meeting created space for information sharing and discussion on developments in these areas, as well as opportunities for the involvement of stakeholders and other members in this process.

The roundtable on Chapter 23 brought together its members, representatives from civil society, universities, and experts to discuss these issues and offer meaningful contributions to this phase of the European integration process.

In this context, Gledis Gjipali, Executive Director of the European Movement in Albania, emphasized the importance of stakeholder inclusion in roundtables and the dissemination of information to both institutions and the public, highlighting civil society's role in providing feedback on strategic documents such as the Cross-Cutting Justice Strategy. He noted the potential of combining PPIE roundtables with Inter-Institutional Groups as models for other negotiation chapters. Tedi Dobi, Deputy Minister of Justice and Chapter 23 negotiator, stressed the need for these platforms amid Albania's preparation to open Clusters 2 and 3 on the economy and competition. He outlined the 14 EU interim benchmarks for Chapter 23, and reported 131 concrete measures identified through weekly EU meetings, linking progress to the Growth Plan for the Western Balkans and the goal of completing technical negotiations by 2027. Elona Bano, Director of Integration and Negotiations, detailed work on Chapters 23 and 24, including addressing 124 critical gaps in the Rule of Law Roadmap, implementing magistrate investigations, reforms for freedom of expression, and police training. She highlighted challenges such as coordination across independent institutions and encouraged civil society and public institutions to strengthen the Rule of Law and the Growth Plan implementation to meet milestones effectively.

RECOMMENDATIONS

On the Legal and Institutional Framework for Specific Issues Covered in Chapter 23

- **Regarding Justice Reform:** It is recommended to change the anonymization system for judges who are appointed or promoted to positions, in order to increase transparency for citizens and to consider the public interest.
- **Regarding Judicial Independence:** It is necessary to continue guaranteeing the independence and non-interference of the judiciary, especially from political factors. However, this independence should be based on the principle of checks and balances to ensure that these institutions remain independent but do not acquire absolute power that cannot be monitored or supervised.
- **Regarding Freedom of Expression:** Legal protection for journalists and media freedom must be guaranteed by creating a separate module for anti-SLAPP directives and providing free legal assistance for journalists.
- **Regarding Minority Rights:** It is required that these minorities are more informed and involved in the process, with increased financial and logistical support to build capacity and ensure comprehensive participation in this phase of the integration process in the country.

On the Process of Meeting the Criteria in the Negotiation Framework

- It is necessary to ensure the quality of the process of fulfilling the obligations under the chapters of the EU integration process to guarantee their closure, not just the opening of new chapters. Given the very tight deadlines, there must be a clear balance between the speed of reforms and their full, substantial fulfillment without compromising quality.
- It is essential to ensure an equal distribution of information regarding the ongoing efforts for the preparation of the Second Rule of Law Report and concrete measures that will be undertaken in Chapter 23, in cities and regions outside of Tirana as these meetings are held.

- Coordination and cooperation among all actors and institutions involved in Chapter 23 is needed. It has been estimated that the Working Group (GNPIE) for Chapter 23 consists of 193 members, which often makes coordination and communication with these involved institutions challenging. A clear distribution of responsibilities, setting deadlines, and continuous communication on the stages of the process could facilitate this coordination and collaboration.
- It is very important to combine measures and reforms between the interim criteria established for Chapter 23 and the measures anticipated in the Reform Agenda of the Growth Plan. It is also crucial to consider the horizontal approach to rule of law issues alongside trade and Single Market issues, as there are instances where these connections are not adequately addressed or appreciated.
- For the negotiation process, it is important to prioritize not only the technical dimension (implementation of reforms, meeting criteria) but also the political dimension, which has sometimes hindered or slowed the process. For this, there must be efforts from Albanian institutions to maintain close communication with both EU institutions and member states and their national institutions.

On the Framework for Cooperation with Civil Society Actors

- It is recommended that state institutions, particularly the Ministry of Justice, communicate more frequently and clearly with civil society actors, especially when providing feedback on their proposed recommendations to ensure that the process is as transparent and interactive as possible.
- It is advised to facilitate joint meetings between members of the PPIE roundtables and members of the Interinstitutional Working Groups (GNPIE) on specific issues or topics where communication and collaboration with representatives of public institutions and civil society actors would be valuable. These meetings would serve to:

- Ensure that discussions are more technical and specific regarding the topics in question, combining the expertise of GNPIE members and civil society actors from PPIE.
- Positively encourage public institutions to understand that communication and discussions with civil society actors are important and valuable, as they share experiences and expertise.
- Clarify for civil society actors the technical aspects of the process, the workload, and commitment required by public institutions, while also specifying where civil society actors can contribute meaningfully to this process.

Roundtable for Chapter 23 – Justice Reform in Progress: The Role of the School of Magistrates and Judicial Integrity in the EU accession process, 20 June 2025

This roundtable for Chapter 23 aimed to bring together representatives of the School of Magistrates, magistrates and professionals, civil society organizations, academics, and law students to discuss the role of training in ensuring integrity and accountability in the judicial system, in line with EU standards. The activity will serve as a platform to share views, challenges, and recommendations on how professional and ethical standards are built and applied through institutional training, both in Albania and in EU member states. Special attention was given to the exchange of best practices, with the participation of an expert from Slovakia who shared concrete models and successful experiences from the EU context.

The session on judicial reform and integrity emphasized the critical role of the School of Magistrates in advancing justice reform in Albania, with Borana Mustafaraj highlighting the need for transparency, accountability, and a shared culture of integrity to strengthen trust in institutions. She reflected on reforms to entry and training processes, including the move to anonymous written exams, integrity checks, and ethics-focused curricula designed with international partners to prepare magistrates for real-world dilemmas. Gledis Gjipali, Executive Director, EMA, stressed the importance of collaboration between civil society, academia, and judicial institutions to strengthen reforms, framing this as part of broader EU integration efforts. Slovak expert Pavol Žilinčík, Lecturer of Judicial Academy of the Slovak Republic and Member of Judicial Selection Committee, underscored that lasting reform depends on embedding ethics and integrity into the judiciary's culture, drawing lessons from Slovakia's institutional failures and stressing the need for "transformative reforms" that reshape behaviours and norms, not just formal structures. Together, the speakers underlined that sustainable judicial reform requires continuous training, open dialogue, and a living ethics framework to ensure credibility, professionalism, and resilience within the justice system.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Reform process

- On Integrating Integrity into Justice Reforms – When focused on integrity, reforms should include it as a central component of the ongoing transformation of the justice system and institutions in Albania. In this regard, reform processes should combine rules with identity, traditions, and informal norms. For example, vetting procedures can strengthen public trust if they are genuine, but erode trust if manipulated. Rigid and clear procedures should therefore be combined with cultural strategies, norms, and history of society concerning integrity, corruption, or conflict of interest. A monitoring exercise should follow, combining internal mechanisms (implemented by the institutions themselves) with external ones, ensuring open cooperation with CSOs, experts, and academia.
- On Alignment with the EU Accession Process – Participants emphasized that strengthening judicial integrity in Albania should be closely tied to the priorities of the EU accession process, particularly Chapter 23 on Judiciary and Fundamental Rights. Embedding integrity in reforms not only addresses internal challenges but also aligns Albania with EU. Judicial institutions should ensure that integrity-related measures are explicitly linked with EU benchmarks, and that monitoring of reforms includes both domestic and EU-driven evaluation mechanisms.

Procedures and Frameworks for a culture of integrity

- On Ethical Frameworks – Judiciaries should not only adopt formal codes of conduct, but ensure that they are accessible, practical, and regularly discussed. For example, the Netherlands uses several complementary codes: one for impartiality and one for judicial staff written in clear, practical language. This makes it easier for judges to see how principles apply in daily practice. Another best practice comes from the Czech Union of Judges which has created an Open Collection of Ethical Dilemmas, where real scenarios are documented and debated. This transforms the code from a static text into a dynamic learning tool.

- On Internalisation of Integrity through Education – Ethics should not be treated as an external add-on but as part of a judge's professional identity, while training and capacity building on integrity should be continuous. Judicial schools should integrate ethics modules not only at entry-level training but throughout a judge's career, reinforcing reflection and peer dialogue. It is recommended based on best practices from other MS:
- Organisation of regular training and workshops that also include case-based discussions: e.g., a new judge whose family members are lawyers, or a judge asked to join a politically sensitive demonstration.
- Facilitating mentorship programs where senior judges, experts from academia and CSOs, and counterparts from the region and EU offer their expertise and mentor especially early-stage magistrates. In Sweden, for example, judicial training encourages judges to ask themselves key ethical questions before acting.
- On Safeguards Against Abuse and Manipulation – Integrity requires credible procedures that are not easily abused, thus it is essential to have transparent, merit-based systems for the selection and promotion of magistrates. Disciplinary systems should be narrowly tailored to genuine misconduct and protected from political or hierarchical abuse. Across some EU member states, ethics have been undermined through manipulated selection procedures, unfair promotions, or disciplinary proceedings used as punishment for independent judges.
- On Creating a Culture of Integrity – Integrity should be internalised through ongoing discussions and community among magistrates in order to cultivate the ethical culture. It is recommended that during collegial meetings within justice institutions a specific focus is given to ethical discussions where issues of conflict of interest, integrity, and moral dilemmas are addressed. The discussions can be established as ethical dilemmas forums where judges discuss and interpret the real scenarios based on the theoretical framework and definitions of integrity. One best practice is the creation of tools such as the traffic-light framework (through guidelines and

RECOMMENDATIONS

practical examples it clarifies what actions are totally acceptable, which ones are questionable, and which are unacceptable. It has been proven that sharing such examples helps in creating a common practice and vocabulary that can be transmitted to other justice institutions and to future generations of magistrates.

Cooperation and Openness

- On Judicial Independence and Public Accountability – Magistrates operate in public life and face dilemmas about speech, association, and participation. Clear guidance is needed to balance independence with accountability. This can happen through developing and preparing context-specific guidelines for magistrates' participation in public life (political affiliation, membership in clubs or business networks, engagement in civic and political life such as demonstrations or media appearances). These guidelines are recommended to include practical examples and a self-assessment checklist concerning integrity and conflict of interest.
- On Public Trust towards Justice Institutions – Judicial integrity is assessed and perceived not only internally but also by society. Public trust collapses when citizens see case manipulation, unfair promotions, or ethical breaches going unaddressed. It is imperative that institutions have transparent procedures, including during the examination, application, and assessment of new magistrates as well as promotions. It is recommended that judicial institutions communicate openly, also welcoming inputs from civil society or academia through training, public activities, and training modules. This helps in building a culture of integrity and accountability, while raising awareness on integrity, its relevance, and challenges.

Roundtable for Chapter 23 – Implementation of the New Law on Personal Data Protection in the Context of Chapter 23 Negotiations: Dialogue with Civil Society and the Private Sector, 15 July 2025

This roundtable for Chapter 23 aimed to bring together civil society organizations, human rights activists, academics, legal professionals, private operators, and media representatives to gain a deeper understanding of the new Law on Personal Data Protection No. 124/2024, adopted in December 2024. Among other things, this law introduces several innovations and new elements that seek to provide more targeted and comprehensive protection of personal data, ensuring better alignment with European Union legislation, as part of the negotiation process and the fulfillment of the interim benchmarks set for Chapter 23 in this sub-area. Also an essential part for discussion was the ongoing work for the approval of secondary legislation to ensure its effective implementation. Special attention was devoted to the exchange of best practices, with the participation of an expert from Slovakia who shared concrete models and successful experiences from the EU context, focusing on the implementation process of the GDPR.

During the discussion, Blerta Nerguti from the Commissioner's Office noted the law's alignment with EU standards but stressed the importance of inclusive consultations with stakeholders. Gledis Gjipali, Executive Director, EMA, highlighted that reforms must not only meet formal EU criteria but also actively involve civil society, business, and experts to ensure meaningful outcomes. Pjerina Mema detailed the law's innovations, such as the right to be forgotten, data portability, stricter supervision, and sanctions, coupled with awareness campaigns to strengthen compliance. Nerguti further explained the consultation process, adoption of five sub-legal acts (with three more underway), and alignment with GDPR and the Police Directive, alongside efforts in capacity building and awareness-raising. Slovak expert Zuzana Motuzova, Lawyer and Co-Founder of Motuzova & Lacko Law Company, shared lessons from GDPR implementation, pointing to inconsistent interpretations, overlaps with domestic law, and a lack of technological expertise, recommending Albania provide clear compliance guidance, focus on substance over formality, and build a culture of data protection and digital security.

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On the Legal Framework for Personal Data Protection

- Albania has made significant progress with the adoption of the new law, which is fully aligned with EU standards and the GDPR. However, since Albania has not yet been included in the EU adequacy decision list, it remains important to:
 - Keep the legal framework continuously updated in line with developments and innovations in the field;
 - Ensure the effective implementation of the law and its by-laws;
 - Guarantee full protection of personal data;
 - Establish effective and functional oversight.
- In drafting and implementing the legal framework for personal data protection, consideration should be given not only to EU requirements and recommendations within the accession negotiations, and alignment with GDPR standards, but also to the latest developments in technology, economy, science, and security. This will make implementation more effective, updated, and above all, inclusive.

On Law Implementation and Institutional Capacities

- With the adoption of the new law and ongoing work on the by-laws, it is essential to:
 - Strengthen the staff capacities of the Commissioner through targeted trainings;
 - Approve a dedicated budget line for this component.

Based on the Slovak experience with the entry into force of the GDPR, the lack of interpretative guidelines and practical orientations from public institutions created uncertainty and confusion in implementation. This led to violations of rights and standards, as well as the imposition of fines and sanctions, which were often challenged in courts as excessive or wrongly applied. This happened because institutions focused on monitoring and inspections while neglecting awareness-raising, guidance, and clear interpretation that would have made implementation easier and more harmonized for operators and controllers. In the Albanian context, the adoption of by-laws and mandatory guidelines by the Commissioner is evaluated positively, alongside ongoing work on sectoral guidance documents of an advisory

and explanatory nature. In this regard, it is recommended that, in addition to these efforts, special attention be given to strengthening the human and financial resources of the Commissioner, as well as conducting wide-scale awareness campaigns, which remain essential for effective and harmonized implementation.

- The field of personal data protection, especially with rapid technological developments, cannot be limited to legal matters alone. Increasingly, it intersects with technology, open data, artificial intelligence, and cybersecurity. For effective application of legislation, these areas need to be understood in connection with each other. The challenge lies in finding local expertise that combines knowledge of both technology and human rights law. Therefore, it is recommended to invest more in developing experts with dual competencies in these domains.
- Strengthening digital literacy and knowledge for all staff of responsible institutions, both at central and local level, would facilitate the collection, processing, and protection of data, while reducing the risk of mistakes or violations.
- An analysis of the financial cost of implementing the new law should also be undertaken, both for public institutions (central and local) and other stakeholders, as implementation will require increased capacities, a dedicated budget, technological infrastructure, more human resources, and training. Such analysis would make the transition period for proper implementation smoother and reduce unforeseen challenges. To achieve this, cooperation between public institutions and non-state actors is strongly suggested, especially in training and capacity-building.
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On Cooperation with and Inclusion of Non-State Actors

- Awareness among non-state actors, controllers and operators, civil society organizations, and citizens regarding personal data protection remains at a low level and needs to be further strengthened and diversified. It is suggested that this process follow three stages: Awareness – Training – Implementation.
 - Awareness: targeting all actors, through publications, meetings and information sessions, use of traditional and digital media, etc.
 - Training: tailored and specific training for key actors and sectors, in cooperation with civil society and business experts.
 - Implementation: if the first two stages are achieved, law implementation by all stakeholders will be more accurate and effective.
- Since the new law introduces novelties and new rights—such as the Right to be Forgotten and the Right to Data Portability—it is recommended to

organize informative activities/sessions not only for responsible stakeholders but also for affected groups. This will ensure:

-Awareness among stakeholders of these rights;
-Clarity on roles, responsibilities, and rights of both affected individuals and controllers/operators in guaranteeing them.

- A dedicated awareness and information campaign should also be conducted for sectors and operators that collect and process sensitive personal data (e.g., genetic, biometric, sexual orientation, or other categories). These require special care and higher levels of security oversight. Stronger cooperation and coordination with both traditional and online media is also suggested, with two key goals:
 - Increasing public information and awareness;
 - Strengthening the knowledge and capacity of media operators themselves, as they are important actors in ensuring data protection. Closer cooperation between the Commissioner and the Audiovisual Media Authority is recommended, both in monitoring reported media content and in organizing trainings and information sessions.
- It is recommended that all operators and actors—civil society, business and the private sector, media, or other stakeholders handling personal data—develop and adopt a Code of Conduct on data protection, in line with Article 35 of Law No. 124/2024 “On Personal Data Protection.” While not mandatory, this instrument will enter into force two years after the law’s entry into force (Article 97, paragraph 2) and serves as a key tool for guiding responsibilities, obligations, limits, and rights of responsible persons, as well as ensuring the correct and harmonized implementation of the law. This is also foreseen under the GDPR as a good practice to help different sectors in proper implementation.
- On the other hand, the Commissioner and public institutions with supervisory or policy-making roles in this field should promote more actively the importance of having a Code of Conduct, by providing necessary information on its advantages and encouraging their adoption by associations or representative bodies of controllers and operators. Moreover, the Commissioner, under Article 35, may incentivize adoption and implementation of these

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codes by granting certifications or special approvals to operators who prepare and apply them in compliance with the law.

- Finally, it is recommended to promote a culture of personal data protection and privacy. This culture should become part of daily life, as a guarantee of respect for dignity and individual rights, thereby building a society grounded in trust and security.

Roundtable for Chapter 23 – Addressing Challenges in the Implementation of the Right to Information: Capacity Gaps, Unsupported Refusals, and Key Obstacles, 13 November 2025

This roundtable for Chapter 23 gathered representatives from civil society, academia, media, public information coordinators, and legal professionals to discuss the implementation of the right to information in Albania, institutional challenges, and the contribution of non-state actors to transparency and accountability. The event took place in the context of the EU integration process, where the European Commission increasingly evaluates not only legal alignment but also the effectiveness of implementation in practice. The roundtable also included comparative insights from Slovakia through an expert contribution from Transparency International Slovakia.

Gledis Gjipali, Executive Director of EMA, underlined that integrating EU standards into national legislation is a demanding process that requires strong institutional commitment and active involvement of civil society and other stakeholders. Transparency remains a core component of good governance and a key element of EU monitoring. Elona Hoxhaj, Director General at the Commissioner's Office, emphasized that the right to public information is a fundamental right for all citizens. While the new Law on Public Information is considered among the most advanced internationally, the main challenge lies in its implementation. She noted that in 2024 there were around 12,000 requests and 1,000 complaints, highlighting recurring issues such as negligence, workload pressure, and unjustified refusals. Emerlinda Pema Guri, Director for Monitoring Transparency Programmes, stressed the horizontal nature of the right to information in the EU context, particularly within Chapter 23 and the Political Criteria. She highlighted the importance of proactive transparency and the obligation of public authorities to publish updated Transparency Programmes, as well as the Commissioner's role in overseeing requests and complaints. From the Slovak perspective, Michal Piško, Director of Transparency International Slovakia, presented both challenges and good practices. He noted concerns related to recent regressions in Slovak legislation, such as extended deadlines and the lack of an independent supervisory authority, while also sharing positive examples like mandatory publication of public contracts and the creation of a centralized state registry.

The open discussion with participants addressed issues such as the scope of documents subject to publication, communication between institutions and the Commissioner, transparency obligations of private entities performing public functions, the distinction between negligence and refusal, digital solutions to reduce administrative burdens, and obligations related to public procurement and sensitive data.

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Institutional Capacities & Implementation Challenges

- According to the 2024 Annual Report of the Commissioner for the Right to Information and Protection of Personal Data, there were 12,000 information requests and around 1,000 complaints submitted to the Commissioner. Based on the Commissioner's assessment, in 60–70% of cases where no response was provided, the cause was negligence or workload; in cases where responses were explicitly denied, the main reasons were confidentiality concerns or unclear requests. In this context, the following is needed:
 - Development of training for public administration on how to classify information, clarifying which information can be provided and which cannot; and increasing transparency (wider publication of information reduces the number of requests).
 - Clarification of responsibility for failure to provide information – under the new law, responsibility no longer falls solely on coordinators but on all representatives of the administration responsible for the information.
 - Clear distinction between ignoring a request and formally refusing it.
- The Commissioner's Office consists of a staff of 15 people but faces serious difficulties in monitoring and supervising the implementation of the law due to limited human resources and insufficient budgeting, leading to growing workload pressures.
- The interpretation of internal acts by institutions often results in unjustified refusal to provide information by categorizing it as an internal document. In many cases, information is disclosed only after the Commissioner's intervention, creating obstacles for CSOs, experts, and public monitoring; this results in additional time and resource costs.

The Role of the Public Information Coordinator

- The role of the coordinator should be twofold:
 - a. to coordinate information requests and provide the requested information;
 - b. to serve as a guiding point for citizens, helping them understand the right to information and how to formulate their request.

c. Positive practices from developed countries show that these offices should be welcoming, empathetic, and offer real support to citizens.

- It is recommended that communication between the Commissioner and the institutions subject to complaints be formal and conducted via email, to ensure traceability, transparency, and easier access for third parties.

Public Information, Awareness-Raising & Communication Channels

- Information and awareness-raising campaigns, as well as training/workshops (in cooperation with CSOs and universities) on:
 - the right to public information;
 - types of information that can be requested;
 - how to prepare a request;
 - procedural steps.
- Diversifying the ways public information is provided: beyond email, post, and phone, the Slovak model allows provision of information through mobile phone and text messaging.
- Transparency is not achieved merely by publishing information – it must be:
 - clear,
 - organized,
 - easy to identify.
 - The current practice of uploading documents in unstructured ways (e.g., unnamed scans) makes public access difficult.
- Digitalizing the list of questions and answers (FAQ) to reduce repeated requests and administrative burden:
 - creation of a chatbot or interactive section,
 - use of artificial intelligence for automated responses.
- The need to build a wider culture of transparency and accountability – not only within public administration but also among citizens, to understand their rights and the limits related to public information.

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Positive Practices from Slovakia

- Mandatory publication of signed contracts by public institutions on both their official websites and the National Online Register (functional since 2020 and only for local government units). A contract that is not published is not valid, a highly effective anti-corruption practice.
- Expansion of the scope of authorities required to provide public information, including:
 - public entities established by law or funded by the state (universities, hospitals, museums);
 - health insurance companies;
 - companies where the state holds majority ownership or controls the board;
 - and as of 2025, NGOs receiving public funds.
 - Suggestion from participants: political parties, private universities, and private hospitals should also be included, as they provide services of public interest.
- Introduction of sanctions for Harassing Requests — requests that do not aim to obtain information but to burden/harass institutions. The law defines their characteristics, and once a request is classified as such, the institution is not obliged to respond and is not penalized. A clear methodology and training are needed for correct identification.

Legislation & Clarification of Legal Obligations

- Clarification of responsibilities under the new law for providing information across all administrative institutions.
- Need for formal and documented communication between the Commissioner and public institutions.

CHAPTER 24 – JUSTICE, FREEDOM, SECURITY

POLICY STRATEGY

EU policies within Chapter 24 – Justice, Freedom, Security aim to maintain and further develop the Union as an area of freedom, security, and justice. Central to this chapter is the alignment with the Schengen acquis, including common rules for border management, visas, residence and work permits, external migration, and asylum. The content of Chapter 24 encompasses several interrelated fields: Schengen and external borders, visa policy, legal and irregular migration, asylum, police cooperation, the fight against organised crime and terrorism, cooperation in the field of drugs, customs cooperation, and judicial cooperation in criminal and civil matters. Any country aspiring to EU membership must demonstrate the administrative capacity and operational readiness to implement these rules effectively, which requires a professional, well-integrated, and efficient police and law enforcement apparatus.

Under the EU accession process, the chapters of the acquis have been grouped into six thematic clusters under the 2020 New Methodology for Enlargement. This clustering promotes a cross-sectoral approach and enhances the dynamism of reform implementation. Chapter 24, as part of Cluster 1 – Fundamentals, alongside Chapters 23, 5, 18, and 32, is among the chapters opened first, reflecting its strategic importance in ensuring Albania meets the foundational standards of rule of law, public order, and security necessary for EU membership.

The opening of accession talks in July 2022 marked a historic milestone for Albania, followed by the screening process for all chapters from September 2022 to November 2023. For Chapter 24, explanatory meetings were held on 22–23 September 2022, providing detailed guidance on the EU acquis, followed by bilateral meetings on 8–10 November 2022, where Albanian institutions presented their national legal and institutional framework, planned reforms, and capacity needs. Following the screening, the European Commission published the Cluster 1 screening report in July 2023, offering an overview of Albania's alignment and providing targeted recommendations for Chapter 24. The report highlighted progress in legislative alignment and institutional establishment while noting the need for tangible results in law enforcement, migration management, and organised crime investigations.

The Second Intergovernmental Conference in October 2024 formally opened Cluster 1 negotiations, reiterating the importance of Chapter 24 as a fundamental pillar of Albania's accession trajectory. The European Commission highlighted a set of interim benchmarks to be achieved prior to the provisional closure of the chapter [8]. A total of 10 benchmarks were set divided into 5 in the fight against organised crime; 2 in the field of drugs, and 3 in the fields of legal and irregular migration, and asylum, and on issues related to the Schengen acquis and external borders.

[8] EU Common Position - Cluster 1: Fundamentals. Brussels, 11 October 2024, pg. 23.
<https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/AD-18-2024-INIT/en/pdf>

CHAPTER 24 – JUSTICE, FREEDOM, SECURITY

POLICY STRATEGY

These benchmarks encompass progress in combating organised crime, enhancing cooperation in the field of drugs, and implementing effective migration and asylum management systems. Specifically, Albania is expected to align fully with EU standards on the criminalisation of money laundering, asset recovery, and confiscation; demonstrate consistent practice in parallel financial investigations; achieve a solid record of investigations, prosecutions, and final convictions in serious and organised crime, including trafficking in human beings, cybercrime, weapons and drugs trafficking, and terrorism; and ensure operational efficiency of the asset recovery office. Efforts to dismantle human trafficking networks, with particular attention to the protection of women and children, are also emphasised as a priority. In the field of drugs, Albania must establish and operate a National Early Warning System and a National Drugs Observatory, align its legislation with EU standards on drugs and precursors, and show tangible results in seizures, destruction, and asset confiscation, including enforcement against illicit cannabis cultivation. In migration and asylum, interim benchmarks require sufficient and sustained border management capacities, alignment in visa policy, measurable progress in combating migrant smuggling, and a fully operational asylum procedure compliant with EU acquis and standards, ensuring the provision of necessary services to asylum seekers.

Albania's strategic framework guiding these reforms includes the Strategy Against Organised and Serious Crime 2021–2025, the Integrated Border Management Strategy 2021–2027, the National Migration Strategy 2024–2030 and its Action Plan 2024–2026, the National Cyber-Security Strategy 2020–2025, and action plans targeting violent extremism and terrorism. A key gap remains the absence of a National Strategy against drugs, which is currently under preparation. Implementation of these strategies, reinforced by strengthened institutional capacities and inter-agency coordination, will be critical to fulfilling the interim benchmarks set by the EU.

The 2025 European Commission Country Report^[9] assessed Albania as moderately prepared in the area of justice, freedom, and security. While progress has been evaluated as in a good level, marking this Chapter as one of three chapters with these progress alongside Chapter 15 - Energy and Chapter 31 - Foreign, Security and Defence Policy, in building operational capacity, legislative alignment, and coordination mechanisms, the report highlighted the need for consistent results in investigations, prosecutions, asset confiscation, border management, and asylum services. These findings underscore that Albania's success in Chapter 24 will depend not only on formal legal alignment but on tangible operational outcomes that demonstrate efficiency, effectiveness, and adherence to EU standards.

^[9] European Commission's Report - Albania 2025, Brussels, 4 November 2025, https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/fe9138b7-90fe-4277-a12c-3a03f6d1957f_en?filename=albania-report-2025.pdf

Overall, the developments of 2024–2025 reaffirm Chapter 24 as a core pillar of Albania’s EU accession process. Meeting the interim benchmarks will require sustained political commitment, strengthened institutional capacity, and cross-sectoral cooperation, both within the government and with civil society partners. Progress in Chapter 24 is not only essential for the provisional closure of Cluster 1 but also signals Albania’s ability to operate within the EU’s area of freedom, security, and justice, a prerequisite for advancing its European integration agenda.

SNAPSHOT OF EC ASSESSMENT FOR ALBANIA – CHAPTER 24

Fight against organised crime [10] - Albania remains moderately prepared in the fight against organised crime. The legal framework is only partially aligned with the EU acquis, although the implementation of the 2021–2025 strategy is nearing completion. The new 2024 Law on the State Police strengthens safeguards against corruption and conflicts of interest. The Law on the Asset Recovery Office was adopted in June 2025, but its full operationalisation is still pending. The Agency for the Administration of Seized and Confiscated Assets continues to face capacity limitations. Direct database access for SPO and NBI has expanded to 19 systems, yet analytical capacity and systematic financial investigations remain insufficient. Albania still lacks a strategic approach for identifying and confiscating assets located abroad. Further use of preventive seizures, non-conviction-based confiscation, and third-party confiscation is needed. Financial investigation techniques require strengthening, especially regarding digital evidence, cryptocurrencies and virtual assets. Good progress was made in 2024, particularly through increased SPAK capacity, stronger efforts against money laundering, and stable levels of seized and confiscated assets (EUR 21 million seized; EUR 10 million confiscated). However, the social reuse of confiscated assets remains largely ineffective. The ARO has been established within the State Police but must still demonstrate full functionality. SPAK’s financial investigation unit continued to deliver tangible results, including through international cooperation. Recruitment of judicial police officers for NBI is still pending despite the December 2024 appointment of the Deputy Director. Albania increased SIENA exchanges by 6.2% and intensified cooperation through INTERPOL, with 25% more joint operations than in 2023. Overall, while progress is visible—particularly in AML and financial investigations—the track record on proactive investigations, high-level cases, and effective asset recovery remains limited and requires sustained efforts.

[9] European Commission’s Report - Albania 2025, Brussels, 4 November 2025, pg. 42-44
https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/fe9138b7-90fe-4277-a12c-3a03f6d1957f_en?filename=albania-report-2025.pdf

Fight against drugs [11] - Albania is partially aligned with the EU acquis on drugs and still lacks a comprehensive national drugs strategy. Full compliance with EU rules on criminal acts and penalties, including for new psychoactive substances, remains necessary. The National Cannabis Control Agency is operational with 21 implementing acts in place, but strong safeguards are needed to prevent diversion if legal cultivation expands. International police and judicial cooperation is well established, and Albania remains actively engaged in EMPACT narcotics priorities. In 2024, a national drugs observatory was formally established, although it is not yet fully operational, and the early warning system for new psychoactive substances requires stronger output. Amendments to the Law on Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances were adopted in December 2024. Cannabis destruction increased significantly, while drug production and trafficking cases remained broadly stable, alongside a notable rise in convictions for both individuals and legal entities involved in drug offences.

Migration and Asylum [12] - Albania has a partially aligned legal framework on migration and human trafficking, while asylum legislation is largely in line with the EU acquis. The national migration strategy (2024–2030) and its action plan are under implementation, but stronger coordination beyond the Ministry of Interior is needed. A revised Law on Foreigners was adopted in June 2025, and Albania obtained observer status in the European Migration Network the same month. Albania continues cooperating closely with the EU, Frontex, IOM, UNHCR and the EU Asylum Agency (EUAA) under the 2024–2027 roadmap, particularly on contingency planning for a potential rise in arrivals. Although Albania remains mainly a transit country and irregular arrivals continued to decline in 2025, further efforts are needed to improve reintegration of returnees, establish practical return cooperation with key countries of origin, and increase the very low rate of voluntary returns. Border and Migration Police still face challenges in identifying vulnerable migrants and referring those in need of protection to the appropriate services, while prescreening procedures at all border points must be standardized. Asylum institutions are in place, but the effective implementation of laws requires increased administrative capacity, more trained staff, and a well-functioning case assessment system. Reception capacity remains broadly sufficient with around 600 beds, including 220 in Babrru, and work has started on dedicated facilities for unaccompanied minors, who must be fully integrated into the national child protection system. The legal framework on trafficking in human beings remains only partially aligned with EU standards and must be amended to reflect the updated 2024 Directive. Albania needs to strengthen identification, investigation and prosecution of traffickers and fully operationalize the National Referral Mechanism. Domestic child trafficking, forced begging and child labour continue to pose challenges despite efforts that broadly reflect international standards.

Visa Policy and Schengen [13] - Albania's visa policy remains only partially aligned with the EU acquis, particularly regarding the list of visa-required countries. Progress has been made, but

[11] European Commission's Report - Albania 2025, Brussels, 4 November 2025, pg. 45-46
https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/fe9138b7-90fe-4277-a12c-3a03f6d1957f_en?filename=albania-report-2025.pdf

[12] *ibid*, pg. 48-49

[13] *ibid*, pg. 50-51

alignment is still slow. Albania maintains visa-free regimes with eleven countries that the EU requires visas for, including six with permanent waivers and five with seasonal waivers – the latter being incompatible with EU rules. In 2025 Albania removed Belarus and Bahrain from these lists and proposed a roadmap toward full alignment, marking a positive step. Border management is broadly satisfactory, supported by the ongoing implementation of the integrated border management strategy 2021-2027. Albania is expected to advance work on adopting a Schengen Action Plan to establish a national Schengen governance system and to ensure rigorous screening of non-EU nationals entering visa-free. Legislative alignment continued with the adoption of the revised Law on Border Control and new laws on API/PNR in June 2025. Operational cooperation with Frontex is progressing well, and border police staffing increased significantly in 2024. However, the Total Information Management System (TIMS) still faces serious security and data-protection vulnerabilities that require urgent resolution, and the newly approved National Coordination Centre for Integrated Border Management needs to become fully operational as soon as possible.

Cybercrime and counterterrorism [14].- Albania has a partially aligned legal framework for counter-terrorism, prevention of violent extremism, and cybercrime, but several gaps remain. Strategies on countering violent extremism, terrorism, and money laundering/terrorist financing are in place and broadly implemented, while the overall threat level remains low and law enforcement bodies operate professionally. However, legislation on explosive precursors and critical infrastructure protection is still not aligned with the EU acquis, and preparation for critical infrastructure resilience remains limited. Monitoring of online content and combating terrorist financing continue to be hindered by insufficient institutional capacities, including gaps related to new technologies such as cryptocurrencies. Although Albania has effectively managed the rehabilitation and reintegration of the 38 repatriated foreign terrorist fighters and their families, sustainable funding is required to ensure long-term continuity. No progress was made on aligning the legal framework on cybercrime and on the criminalisation of child sexual abuse and exploitation, which requires swift harmonisation with EU directives. While the 2024 Law on Cybersecurity and the updated list of critical information infrastructure operators represent steps forward, the Law on Critical Infrastructure Protection still needs to be adopted and aligned with EU standards. Efforts to prevent radicalisation have strengthened through regional security councils and enhanced national-local cooperation, but online radicalisation, prison radicalisation, and terrorist content online remain significant challenges. Albania continues working on the repatriation of citizens from Al-Hol and Al-Roj, with over 70 nationals still estimated to remain there.

Judicial cooperation [15].- The legal framework for judicial cooperation in civil and criminal matters is partially aligned with the EU acquis, in line with what is currently feasible. Overall cooperation with EU Member States, the European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO) and Eurojust remains broadly

[14] European Commission's Report - Albania 2025, Brussels, 4 November 2025, pg. 46-47
https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/fe9138b7-90fe-4277-a12c-3a03f6d1957f_en?filename=albania-report-2025.pdf

[15] *ibid*, pg. 47

satisfactory, with operational channels functioning well. Albania's ratification on 13 February 2025 of the Hague Convention of 2 July 2019 on the Recognition and Enforcement of Foreign Judgments in Civil or Commercial Matters (the 2019 Judgments Convention) represents an important step forward and will enter into force for Albania on 1 March 2026, further facilitating cross-border civil judicial cooperation. Albania continued its active engagement with Eurojust: during the reporting period, it was involved in 152 new cases, primarily concerning organised crime, drug trafficking, and money laundering, with the majority (89 cases) initiated at the request of the Liaison Prosecutor. Cooperation through joint investigation teams (JITs) also remained strong. Between 1 March 2024 and 31 July 2025, Albania participated in 25 Eurojust-supported JITs, most of which (16) focused on narcotics-related offences. This reflects a sustained commitment to coordinated investigations and the growing operational relevance of Albania's judicial authorities within the broader European justice framework. Continued progress will depend on further legislative alignment with EU instruments and ensuring that institutions have the capacity and resources to manage increasing levels of cross-border cooperation.

FUTURE MEASURES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This section highlights the convened DCTs and recommendations provided within the National Convention on European Integration, in synergy with the Partnership Platform for European Integration pursuant to Prime Minister's Order no. 113, dated 30.08.2019 “On the forms of participation, functioning and institutional structure of the Partnership Platform for European Integration”. The Ministry of Interior is the leading institution for Chapter 24 - Justice, Freedom, Security, and as such some of the roundtables were held in close collaboration with its representatives. Two of the Chapter 24 roundtables held during this period, specifically focused on money laundering and FinTech, were organised in collaboration with the Agency for Financial Intelligence (AIF), which is the main Albanian institution fighting financial crime and terrorist financing by gathering financial intelligence, supervising at-risk entities, and coordinating with law-enforcement bodies. During the roundtables, members of this DCTs have been present along other stakeholders who contribute and possess expertise on the specific issues discussed on each roundtable.

Roundtable: From Strategy to Action: Managing Irregular Migration and Meeting the Interim Benchmarks for Chapter 24, April 29, 2025

This roundtable aimed to inform civil society actors and other stakeholders about the implementation progress of the National Migration Strategy 2024–2030 and its Action Plan, with a particular focus on steps taken to meet the interim benchmarks related to migration, asylum, and integrated border management under Chapter 24. The roundtable also sought to foster dialogue between institutions and non-state actors, contributing to a more transparent and accountable policymaking process. An added value of this meeting was the exchange of best practices with EU Member States, as a Slovak expert shared their experiences and practical recommendations on migration governance and the EU accession process.

In this light, Gledis Gjipali, Executive Director of the European Movement in Albania, opened the meeting by highlighting the importance of involving civil society in monitoring and contributing to the implementation of Albania's Migration Strategy under Chapter 24, building on progress since the strategy's approval a year ago. Suela Jahaj, Director for Integration and International Agreements at the Ministry of the Interior, detailed the interim benchmarks for Chapter 24, noting ongoing gaps in legislation, institutional structures, and capacity building, while highlighting strategic developments such as the Asset Recovery Office, the National Early Warning System, and the National Drug Observatory. Silvana Banushi, General Director for Migration and Asylum Development, outlined the implementation of the Migration Strategy and Action Plan, emphasizing priorities like harmonising legislation with EU directives, strengthening institutional coordination, preventing irregular migration, and supporting refugee integration. She also noted achievements such as Albania's observer status in the European Migration Network, enhanced Border Police capacities, decentralization of migration services, and protection measures for unaccompanied minors. Miroslava Mittelmánová from Slovakia shared insights and recommendations from the Slovak experience, emphasizing the critical role of civil society and local authorities in managing migration effectively and integrating newcomers, particularly highlighting lessons learned from hosting Ukrainian nationals following the 2022 war. Overall, the meeting underscored the importance of multi-level cooperation, civil society engagement, and continuous adaptation to advance Albania's Chapter 24 commitments.

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- A clear distinction must be made between unaccompanied and separated children, by foreseeing such a differentiation also in the relevant legislation. For example, in Slovak law, there is no clear definition of what constitutes a separated child, which makes it difficult to handle such cases in a proper and accurate manner. For this reason, the treatment of such cases should be approached by focusing on the best interest of the child, ensuring appropriate protection for them.
- There appears to be an increase in the number of unaccompanied children crossing the border and entering Albanian territory irregularly, especially from Greece, and their accommodation remains a problem. These children cannot be placed in closed centers for migrants, thus requiring greater attention in resolving this issue and ensuring children's rights, by guaranteeing that they have suitable environments and services for minors, as also provided for in Conventions and international instruments.
- According to Slovak experience, the type of residence permit for foreigners can affect their full integration. The case of migrants from Ukraine, who are beneficiaries of temporary protection, has revealed several issues, such as:
 - Lack of the right to own a business – Foreigners with temporary protection status are not allowed to obtain a trade license, forcing them to engage in illegal activities.
 - Difficulties in education – For children holding a 6-month residence permit, attending compulsory education in Slovakia is not mandatory. As a result, in many cases they do not attend school, making them more vulnerable to exploitation, sexual violence, or trafficking, since they are not under the supervision of parents or adults for a large part of the day.
- Currently, there is no updated data on foreigners entering Albania, especially those who enter and stay irregularly. The data published by INSTAT, although released periodically, is insufficient and not published in a timely manner. To have a clearer and real-time updated overview, better coordination is needed among institutions such as the State Police, the Ministry of Interior, or the Ministry of Welfare to provide updated data according to the type of migrants, along with other important demographic information. These data are important to identify and better understand the situation of migrants in Albania, so that the policies and measures undertaken are in response to this picture.
- Migrants who enter Albania irregularly often become victims of violence, sexual exploitation, trafficking, or smuggling. In most cases, they view Albania as a transit country, which makes them more easily exposed to risks such as trafficking and smuggling. For this reason, increased attention is needed to assess and address these irregular migration situations as potential risks for the migrants but also as a risk for the growth and strengthening of organized crime.
- It is recommended that municipalities and local government authorities play a more active role in supporting migrants by offering services that are tailored and informed by their needs.
 - Best practices from Slovakia include the creation of one-stop-shops where migrants can access all services related to their integration and the protection of their rights, including employment, healthcare, accommodation, and education. This model reduces bureaucracy and enables easier guidance for migrants, helping them understand their rights and responsibilities.
 - Local authorities in Slovakia have developed and implemented several strategic plans focused on the integration of foreigners, which serve as guidelines and concrete measures to ensure the provision of necessary services and the protection of migrants' rights. These strategies are customized to the specific needs of different groups of migrants, including those under temporary protection.
- It is recommended that periodic and targeted monitoring be carried out by independent institutions such as the People's Advocate and/or the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination, in order to ensure a fair and accurate assessment of reception conditions, accommodation, and services for foreigners. These monitoring visits should be conducted without prior notice, to obtain a genuine and unfiltered view of the conditions and services provided in these centers.

-Part of the monitoring process should be the drafting of Monitoring Reports, which must provide important information and recommendations for improvements. These reports should be published and shared both with the responsible institutions and with relevant stakeholders, to enable the implementation of further measures.

-It is recommended that civil society organizations, especially those working directly with migrants and targeted vulnerable groups, be included in these monitoring processes.

- Closer cooperation with public authorities, particularly local ones, is necessary to ensure accurate and detailed information on the needs of migrants and to enable the provision of more appropriate and effective services.
- Civil society organizations should be more actively involved in the process of policy-making and implementation, ensuring that the needs of migrants are addressed in an efficient and timely manner. The work of these organizations on the ground, through direct contact with affected groups, can offer more detailed and accurate information to responsible institutions—information that is essential for effective governance and the improvement of migrant conditions at the local level.
- CSOs that provide legal expertise and analysis should play a more proactive role in monitoring the drafting and implementation of laws, by offering recommendations and identifying issues that may arise during the application of the law. A successful example comes from Slovakia, where civil society organizations advocated—using legal arguments—for amendments to the Law on Foreigners, in order to ensure a more complete and fair integration of migrants into society. This law was amended following civil society’s intervention and advocacy work, aligning it with international standards and EU directives.
- Information about the free legal aid service should be made available in the service offices of local authorities, through meetings with staff who can strengthen and facilitate communication and connection with legal aid providers. Additionally, simple informative brochures should be used, prepared in several foreign languages, to ensure that the information is understandable to all migrants and foreigners.
- There should be greater cooperation with civil society organizations that provide free legal services and have legal expertise and legal representatives who can offer direct legal assistance and support to migrants and foreigners.
- It is recommended to conduct information and awareness-raising campaigns, in cooperation with state institutions, civil society organizations, and international organizations such as UNHCR, IOM, Save the Children, and UNICEF, to ensure that the information reaches all those in need.
- Trainings and capacity building activities should be organized for public authority employees, so they understand the importance of free legal aid services and are capable of providing accurate and necessary information to interested parties.

Albanian law provides for free legal aid for migrants and foreigners, but often those in need of this service lack proper information about the procedures they must follow to benefit from it. For this, the following steps are recommended:

Roundtable: The Importance of Public Education on Money Laundering – Strengthening Cooperation with Non-State Actors, 21 May 2025

This roundtable for Chapter 24, organized by the European Movement in Albania (EMA) in cooperation with the Albanian Financial Intelligence Agency (AIF), focused on raising awareness regarding the implementation of the Public Education Strategy on Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism 2025–2027, and the role of civil society and the private sector in combating money laundering.

In this regard, Gledis Gjipali, Executive Director of EMA, emphasized that as Albania’s EU integration progresses, institutional responsibilities grow, but meaningful involvement of civil society, business, and academia is essential to understand the impacts and costs of reforms. He highlighted successful collaborations through platforms like the National Convention on European Integration and the Partnership Platform for European Integration, and called for strengthened dialogue throughout the process. Nikolin Jaka, President of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Tirana, stressed the need for the business sector to meet national and international standards, invest in human resources and technology, and actively participate in integration efforts, particularly to prevent money laundering. Agim Muslia, Director of Compliance and IT at AIF, presented the Public Education Strategy on Anti-Money Laundering, emphasizing awareness-raising, interinstitutional coordination, and engagement of civil society, schools, universities, and the media to mitigate the economic, social, and security impacts of money laundering. Andrej Leontiev, lawyer and AML expert from Slovakia, shared EU examples highlighting the crucial role of non-state actors, or “gatekeepers,” in monitoring beneficial ownership and reporting suspicious cases, noting that 95% of such reports in Slovakia came from civil society and journalists. He concluded that while corruption and money laundering cannot be completely eradicated, their deterrence can be increased by raising transactional costs and ensuring active cooperation between public institutions and non-state actors.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- It is important to acknowledge that the phenomenon of money laundering will always be present. Therefore, the focus should be on taking preventive measures. In this context, public education should be treated as a preventive tool to help mitigate risks and foster a deeper understanding of this issue.
- For the strategy to be effectively implemented, better coordination and engagement among the involved actors is necessary. This coordination should take place on two levels:
 1. Improved institutional coordination among public bodies and law enforcement agencies, with a clear definition of their respective responsibilities;
 2. Strengthened cooperation with non-state actors such as the business community, civil society, academia, and the media.

Regarding the target groups for education and awareness-raising efforts, special attention should be paid to:

- The business community, which is increasingly being targeted or misused for money laundering purposes. More informative activities and trainings are needed to raise awareness of the relevant criminal offenses and ways to protect economic activity from being misused.
- Students and young people, through cooperation with schools and universities, in order to raise awareness and build knowledge about this phenomenon from an early stage.
- Legal professionals and law enforcement institutions where trainings may even be mandatory and accompanied by testing and certification. Practice has shown that prosecutors, judges, and the police require continuous updates on developments in this field.
- The Slovak model for education includes three phases, which may serve as examples of good practice for inclusive public education:

1. Creating and disseminating information for targeted groups;
2. Developing up-to-date educational materials and curricula tailored to the needs and interests of these groups;
3. Involving as many stakeholders as possible in public outreach and awareness-raising activities through public information channels.

The stakeholders known as "gatekeepers" (such as journalists, representatives of civil society, business, etc.) play an important role in ensuring transparency and flagging suspicious cases. To support this, the following are necessary:

- Public institutions must be open and transparent, especially regarding data on businesses, public procurement, and beneficial owners.
- Journalists, NGOs, and the business community must be self-motivated to signal and monitor cases, through analysis of public data.
- Legal professionals such as lawyers, notaries, accountants, or banks should be encouraged to cooperate with authorities and report discrepancies or suspicious cases. They can serve as trusted intermediaries in verifying ownership data or identifying clients.
- The legitimate interest of journalists and NGOs to access the register of beneficial owners must be recognized, without practical obstacles.
- Data on the ultimate beneficiaries of public funds, public contracts, or state assets should be accessible and transparent to the public.
- Civil society must be engaged not only as an actor that contributes to the fight against money laundering but also made aware of the risk it poses through its potential misuse as a tool for money laundering. It has a dual role – as a protector and as an entity at risk.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Non-state actors such as businesses, media, banks, or independent professionals should be valued for the expertise, capacities, and resources they can offer. To join forces with public institutions, the first step must be to inform and raise their awareness of the benefits of being part of this process.
- The media and journalists have an irreplaceable role in education and awareness-raising. This involvement should take place in two forms:
 1. Through dedicated capacity-building trainings, familiarizing them with the phenomenon, terminology, and the latest developments.
 2. By encouraging investigative journalism, with more space for analytical and investigative articles that go beyond event reporting.
- Public institutions must be more cooperative with the media, by informing and involving them in public activities to ensure media coverage and increase public outreach.
- The media should be more proactive. For example, in Slovakia it has been observed that successful cases in the fight against money laundering have been promoted in the media – as a result of the work of public institutions, but also due to investigations by civil society or the business sector. These cases serve as an incentive for greater awareness and further involvement.

Information and awareness-raising on Financial Technology (Fintech) – the innovations and risks it brings in the context of combating money laundering, 30 October 2025

This roundtable for Chapter 24, organized by the European Movement in Albania (EMA) in cooperation with the Financial Intelligence Agency (AIF), focused on raising awareness about FinTech, its innovations, and the risks it poses in combating money laundering, terrorism financing, and the financing of weapons of mass destruction.

In this regard, Gledis Gjipali, Executive Director of EMA, highlighted the rapid digitalization of finance and the importance of sharing knowledge, models, and practical experiences. He emphasized the role of civil society in monitoring and supporting regulatory measures and the need for continued dialogue between institutions and non-state actors. Ervin Koçi, Director General of AIF, presented the agency's dedicated FinTech sector, explaining how it monitors risks and aligns with European financial security standards. Valentina Semi, Deputy Director at the Bank of Albania, stressed the evolution of payment systems and liquidity management tools, highlighting challenges and opportunities for collaboration across institutions and borders. Ada Qazolli, Chair of the Compliance Committee at the Albanian Banking Association, underscored the need for innovation to remain compatible with international standards, while Irida Goxharaj, Executive Manager of the Albanian Association of Foreign Exchange Offices, emphasized the digitalization of cash operations and transparency measures such as e-Albania. Redina Nasi, Head of the FinTech Sector at AIF, discussed legal frameworks, risks linked to cryptocurrencies, and preventive measures, including AI-supported fraud detection. Andrej Leontiev, lawyer and AML expert from Slovakia, shared examples of how artificial intelligence affects financial fraud and highlighted the need for strong regulations and awareness campaigns.

The discussion concluded with exchanges on strategies for public awareness and preventive measures, underlining the importance of cooperation among institutions and civil society, and the adoption of best practices from regional and EU countries.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The rapid growth of FinTech and digital finance presents both opportunities for innovation and challenges for regulation. Financial innovation must be accompanied by a proactive approach to preventing money laundering, fraud, and cybercrime. Risk mitigation should be treated as a preventive tool to safeguard consumers, businesses, and the financial system. Measures to mitigate risks may include:

-Implementation of real-time transaction monitoring and AI-driven fraud detection systems to quickly identify suspicious activities.

-Use of blockchain analytics and secure system integrations to track digital asset movements and prevent exploitation through APIs or third-party connections.

-Regular staff training, public awareness campaigns, and clear guidance for users to identify and respond to phishing, social engineering, and investment or employment scams. Special attention should be paid to seniors and older people, who may be less familiar with digital finance practices and more vulnerable to scams.

-Development of incident response plans and continuous monitoring of emerging threats to keep policies and systems up-to-date.

Operational coordination and AML classification

- Establish 24/7 fraud officer services within banks, enabling police or other authorities to communicate directly and report or investigate suspicious activities immediately.
- Treat all suspicious financial losses or thefts as potential AML cases. While it may sometimes be difficult to classify these incidents at the outset, it is recommended to treat them as the worst-case scenario: potential money laundering. This allows for a more rapid and thorough investigation, protects victims, and prevents gaps in oversight.
 - Victims should:
 - Report any suspicious financial activity immediately, even if uncertain whether it constitutes fraud or theft.
 - Receive guidance on how the case will be investigated under AML procedures to ensure a swift response and protection.
 - Banks and financial institutions:
 - Ensure timely reporting with sufficient detail to support AML investigations.

- Law enforcement and regulatory authorities should:
 - Prioritize rapid investigation and coordination with banks to minimize delays and gaps.
 - Use AML classification to enable comprehensive analysis, tracing, and prevention of further criminal activity.

Coordination among key actors

- Improved regulatory coordination among supervisory authorities at national and international levels, with clear allocation of responsibilities and harmonized approaches to emerging FinTech models, including neobanks, crypto-asset service providers, and blockchain-based platforms.
- Strengthened cooperation with non-state actors such as FinTech companies, traditional financial institutions, civil society, the banking sector, academia, and media to share knowledge, best practices, and intelligence on emerging threats.

Target groups for awareness-raising and capacity-building

- FinTech providers (digital-only banks, crypto exchanges, crowdfunding platforms, Buy Now Pay Later providers) require continuous guidance to embed AML and fraud mitigation measures into their business models.
- Customers and end-users should be educated on risks including synthetic identities, account takeover, phishing, social engineering, fake investment platforms, online romance scams, and employment fraud.
- Seniors and older people should be specifically targeted, as they are often less familiar with digital finance practices and more vulnerable to scams.
- Legal and compliance professionals, as well as regulators, should benefit from ongoing capacity-building, training, and certification in the latest AML, cybercrime, and fraud detection technologies.
- Encourage careful online practices by users: verify email addresses and URLs, check investment or employment offers, use strong passwords and two-factor authentication, and exercise caution when sharing personal data online.

RECOMMENDATIONS

International collaboration and knowledge-sharing

- Monitor Fraud-as-a-Service platforms, malicious bots, deepfake technology, and other sophisticated cybercrime tactics.
- Promote standards for secure APIs, mobile applications, and blockchain transactions.
- Align national legislation and regulatory guidance on virtual assets with international best practices, including FATF recommendations and EU AML Directives (AMLD5/6).

Role and involvement of non-state actors

- FinTech companies and financial institutions should adopt best practices, integrate compliance into business models, and raise awareness among clients about digital finance risks.
- Civil society and academia should be engaged as contributors to the fight against fraud and money laundering and made aware of potential risks in using digital finance platforms; they have a dual role as protectors and entities at risk.
- Media and journalists play an irreplaceable role in public education and awareness-raising:
 - Through capacity-building, familiarizing them with FinTech, virtual assets, and cybercrime phenomena.
 - By encouraging investigative reporting that exposes scams and fraudulent schemes to incentivize public awareness.
- Public authorities must maintain transparency regarding online platforms, investment opportunities, and the regulatory framework for virtual assets, and cooperate with media and civil society to enhance outreach.
- Users and the public should be empowered with knowledge and tools to protect themselves, including guidance on spotting phishing attempts, verifying offers, avoiding scams, and knowing steps to take if they fall victim to fraud.

CHAPTER 5 – PUBLIC PROCUREMENT

POLICY STRATEGY

EU policies within Chapter 5 focus on public procurement, aiming to standardize procedures for public works, supply, and service contracts conducted by public institutions in all Member States, including complaint and review mechanisms. Public procurement is a strategic instrument for creating and safeguarding public value, moving beyond administrative management to supporting broader socio-economic objectives. Due to its central role, Chapter 5 is included in Cluster 1 – Fundamentals, and is typically opened last within the cluster during accession negotiations.

Public procurement in the EU is framed around the 3P model – Preparation, Purchase, Perform – a circular and continuous process that ensures policy objectives, procurement procedures, and social contracts are integrated and consistently applied. This approach distinguishes public procurement from private sector purchasing by emphasizing transparency, fairness, and the generation of public value. Alignment with the EU directives requires accession countries to implement robust legislative and procedural frameworks consistent with EU standards; build capable, well-resourced institutions to oversee procurement; ensure transparency, integrity, and accessibility in complaint mechanisms for economic operators; promote fair competition, value-for-money, and adherence to EU principles in all procurement operations.

Albania's strategic framework for Chapter 5 includes the National Public Procurement Strategy (NPPS) 2024–2030 and its Action Plan 2024–2027, alongside Law No. 162/2020 on Public Procurement, amended to align with EU directives, and Law No. 125/2013 on Concessions and PPPs, currently under revision to meet Directive 2014/23/EU standards. The legal framework also incorporates sector-specific legislation, including Law No. 36/2020 on Defence and Security Procurement, and multiple DCMs regulating thresholds, electronic procurement procedures, and common procurement vocabulary.

According to the three provisional closing benchmarks set by the EU Common Position for Cluster 1 – Fundamentals, Albania is expected to fully align its national legal framework with the EU acquis in all areas of public procurement, including legislation on concessions and public-private partnerships, as well as international agreements that exempt certain procurements from standard public procurement rules, in accordance with the EC Treaty, EU procurement legislation, and other relevant provisions of the EU acquis. The country must also establish adequate administrative and institutional capacity at all levels, taking the necessary measures to ensure the proper implementation and enforcement of national legislation well in advance of accession. Furthermore, Albania is expected to demonstrate a solid track record of a fair and transparent public procurement system that guarantees value for money, promotes competition, and provides robust safeguards against corruption.

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Albania is moderately prepared in public procurement. Limited progress was made in the alignment of the legal framework for public procurement.[10]

The Commission's recommendations from last year were partially implemented and remain mostly valid. In the coming year, Albania should, in particular continue efforts to improve competitive procurement procedures; further align the legislative framework with the EU acquis in the area of concessions and public-private partnerships, and start work on further alignment with the EU acquis in the field of defence and security procurement; ensure compliance with the EU acquis and the Stabilisation and Association agreement (SAA) on intergovernmental agreements concluded with third countries in the area of public procurement.[16]

The legal framework on public procurement is largely aligned with the 2014 EU Directive on public procurement and procurement of utilities. A number of implementing legislations were adopted in September 2024 to implement the amended law on public procurement (PPL) The transitional provision in the new PPL authorising central government institutions to negotiate and conclude international consultancy agreements in "areas of strategic interest" thus exempting from opening competition, continues to raise concerns over its compliance with the EU acquis and with the stabilisation and association agreement.[17]

The law on concessions and public-private partnerships (PPPs) is partially aligned with the EU acquis. Work on a substantial revision of the PPP law with a view to aligning it with the EU acquis has not yet been concluded. Albania's public procurement market represented 16.5% of GDP in 2024 (compared to 6.7% of GDP in 2023). The use of negotiated procedures without prior publication reduced in 2024, both in number of procedures (2.3% of all procedures from 2.9% in 2023 and in related value (0.4% of total value from 2% in 2023). There was a significant increase in new framework contracts; both in numbers in (1 601 in 2024, from 763 in 2023) and in terms of value. This is attributed in part to the start of operations of the newly set-up Central Procurement Organisation. The application of the most economically advantageous tender criteria (MEAT) for the award of public procurement contracts increased in 2024, both in terms of awarded tenders in which it was used (4.8% in 2024 compared with 3.6% in 2023), and particularly in terms of value of associated contracts (41% in 2024 compared with 20.3% in 2023). PPA has issued new guidelines on the use of meat in September 2024 and has increased related training.

[16] European Commission's Report - Albania 2025, Brussels, 4 November 2025, pg.9.

https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/fe9138b7-90fe-4277-a12c-3a03f6d1957f_en?filename=albania-report-2025.pdf

[17] Ibid, pg. 58-59.

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The use of new PPPs and concessions remains at very low levels. In 2024, only one procedure was launched and none was awarded. The contracting authorities need to continue to build capacity to manage public procurement processes. Work has started on preparation of technical specifications for an upgrade of the electronic procurement system. Ongoing training continued with 3 139 (247 in 2023) participants being registered from 443 (98 in 2023) central, local and independent institutions and private entities in 2024. On prevention of corruption in public procurement, Albania should focus on further strengthening the functioning of the overall system to increase competition, compliance and professionalisation. The constitution and the PPL contain provisions on the right to legal remedy that are mostly in line with the directives on remedies. The implementation capacity of the State Appeal Commission (SAC) needs to be further strengthened in view of the significant number of appeals it receives (1 151 in 2024, in 1 019 in 2023). In 2024, the Public Procurement Commission (PPC) made 1050 decisions, 42 of which were challenged in court. [18]

FUTURE MEASURES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This section highlights the convened DCTs and recommendations provided within the National Convention on European Integration, in synergy with the Partnership Platform for European Integration pursuant to Prime Minister's Order no. 113, dated 30.08.2019 “On the forms of participation, functioning and institutional structure of the Partnership Platform for European Integration”. Based on this order, the Public Procurement Agency published a call on its official website on December 1st, 2023, as the leading institution for Chapter 5 on the negotiation process in Albania, to invite different stakeholders (civil society organisations, local actors, business community, media and academia representatives) to become members of the DCT, and contribute with their perspective and recommendations to the other institutions, European Integration Secretariat and other responsible bodies for the European Integration process for the field of interest they cover, and to monitor and assess the assistance provided by the EU for Albania. The first DCT had its main focus not only to expand the dialogue on the pertaining concerns to Chapter 5, but also to disseminate this call and invite different actors to provide their expertise within PPIE. After the establishment of this DCT, three other roundtables convened revolving around various concerns on Chapter 5.

[18] European Commission's Report - Albania 2025, Brussels, 4 November 2025, pg.9.

https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/fe9138b7-90fe-4277-a12c-3a03f6d1957f_en?filename=albania-report-2025.pdf

Roundtable for Chapter 5 – Public Procurement: Meeting the provisional closing benchmarks within the accession negotiations framework, 10 June 2025

The opening of negotiations for Cluster 1 – Fundamentals, with the holding of the Second Intergovernmental Conference on 15 October 2024, also marked setting three provisional closing benchmarks for Chapter 5 – Public Procurement. These include the alignment of Albanian legislation in all areas of public procurement with EU public procurement legislation and other relevant provisions of the EU acquis; the fulfilment of adequate administrative and institutional capacities at all levels, and the undertaking of appropriate measures to ensure the effective implementation and enforceability of national legislation in this field; as well as the demonstration of a consistent track record in applying the fundamental principles governing this area.

This roundtable aimed to serve as a discussion platform on meeting the relevant benchmarks and on how non-state actors can make a greater contribution to this process, while also presenting the findings of the monitoring report on the implementation of the principles of Public Administration Reform (PAR) in public procurement practices, in the fields of tourism and environment in Albania. The roundtable's participants were from the civil society organisations, public institutions, academia, etc.

In the discussion, Gledis Gjipali (EMA) stressed the need for deeper multi-level cooperation and meaningful consultations to accelerate EU accession, noting Albania's rapid legislative process and limited time for public input. From the Public Procurement Agency, Geri Pilaca highlighted ongoing efforts to meet benchmarks, including revising the Law on Concessions and PPPs in line with EU directives, while Xhoana Ristani detailed progress on Chapter 5, where Albania holds a regional advantage, but where greater focus is still needed on transparency, integrity, and competition. She outlined actions to address three main benchmarks: alignment of the legal framework, strengthening administrative capacity through training and certification, and ensuring transparency via statistical reports, corruption-risk methodologies, and integrity models. In the end, the discussion was enriched by the input of a civil society representative, where Elda Zotaj emphasized the critical role of civil society in monitoring reforms, presenting findings of a report which considers the implementation of Public Administration Reform (PAR) in public procurement and public finance management in the framework of the WeBER 3.0 project, that showed partial implementation of transparency and competition standards, and criticized the marginal reference to civil society in the new Public Procurement Strategy, underlining that its inclusion is essential for transparency, democracy, trust in institutions, and better public services.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the first panel of the roundtable, where the planned measures and their status for successfully meeting the three benchmarks set for Chapter 5 – Public Procurement were presented, the following recommendations emerged from the discussions:

- With regard to the second closing benchmark set by the EU upon the opening of negotiations for this chapter on 15 October 2024, which stipulates that “Albania puts in place adequate administrative and institutional capacity at all levels and takes appropriate measures to ensure the proper implementation and enforcement of national legislation in this area in good time before accession”; it is important that the implementation of social criteria is not limited solely to close cooperation with the National Employment and Skills Agency for the employment of registered individuals. This criterion should not be conceived only in such a narrow dimension, but should also encompass other social elements in the administration and implementation of the public procurement process. The Centralised Purchasing Operator, as well as other relevant institutions, should identify additional ways to apply the social criterion more effectively. Furthermore, the process of selecting registered beneficiaries must be more transparent, properly documented, and supported by clear statistics in order to ensure accountability from other actors involved in the process as well.
- Considering the low number of foreign companies involved in the public procurement system in Albania, greater resilience is needed to address challenges in this area, particularly after accession to the European single market. To demonstrate preparedness in this regard prior to EU membership, it is essential to conduct detailed analyses of the reasons preventing these entities from participating in public tenders, as even in cases where they do participate, the contract values remain very low, as also reflected in the annual reports published by the Public Procurement Agency. For this reason, an analysis of the situation of commercial companies registered in Albania with foreign ownership, as well as foreign associations operating in the country, would be valuable in better understanding the existing barriers and distinguishing between them. Furthermore, strengthening cooperation with the Competition Authority is recommended, with the aim of fostering fairer and more effective competition in the field of public procurement.

- Regarding the application of artificial intelligence (AI) in the public procurement system, questions were raised about how this process will unfold in practice, as well as the need to ensure that the use of AI is grounded in clear standards and ethical principles. The importance of not overlooking the “human” component in this technological transformation was also emphasized. The active involvement of professionals remains essential to guarantee transparency, and a balanced approach between technology and human intervention must be maintained to ensure the proper functioning of the public procurement system in line with its fundamental principles.

The discussions held during the second panel focused on the role of civil society as a continuous monitoring actor in the public procurement process. The following points were highlighted as particularly valuable:

- Civil society should have a more prominent role and greater recognition for the contribution it provides, particularly in the process of drafting strategic and monitoring documents. For example, in the National Public Procurement Strategy 2024–2030 and the Action Plan 2024–2027, adopted by the Council of Ministers in May 2024, the contribution of civil society is mentioned only once, specifically on page 38. This highlights the need for its more structured and meaningful involvement at all stages of the process—from consultation and discussion to drafting and monitoring the implementation of policies. Civil society should be treated as an equal and integral partner in developing a fair, transparent, and inclusive public procurement system.
- Strengthening cooperation between various central institutions and civil society is essential, which implies not only broader access to relevant documentation but also inclusion in direct discussions with technical staff and decision-makers. Such an approach would enable civil society to gain a deeper understanding of the current situation regarding various challenges encountered, as well as to produce valuable and reliable reports that reflect the implementation of reform standards, as is the case with the Public Administration Reform.

- In addition, civil society also plays an important role in raising public awareness, where direct cooperation with it can increase knowledge in this highly specific field and contribute to addressing and shaping public perceptions—many of which regard this sector as one of the most exposed to misuse, being the primary sector linked to the management of public funds.

MONITORING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE ROUNDTABLES OF NATIONAL CONVENTION ON EUROPEAN INTEGRATION 2023-2025

ADDRESSED RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHAPTER 23

The Active Role of Civil Society in the Roadmap for the Functioning of Democratic Institutions within the Political Criteria Framework, 22 January 2024[19]

During the reporting period the first session of WG for Chapter 23 was organized on 22 January 2024, with the main focus on the Functioning of Democratic Institutions Roadmap. During the discussions between civil society organizations and representatives of Ministry of Justice (as lead institution for drafting this roadmap) it is observed that the updated version of this roadmap has included some new measures or has updated the measures foreseen which are now aligned with some of the recommendations that have been extracted during this session. More specifically:

- Policy recommendations point (1), point (2) and point (3) urge “a closer and proactive collaboration between the Central Election Commission and civil society for deeper engagement and involvement of CSOs in the media monitoring process during the electoral campaign”. Also, it is encouraged “the establishing of a more structured and sustainable dialogue with interested civil society actors”, while it is suggested the CEC to “map out the organisations with experience and expertise in this field and contact them directly to involve them in the process”. These recommendations are in line with the updated measures of the Functioning of Democratic Institutions Roadmap included in the subfield: The Electoral Process, such as: “Continuous implementation of robust monitoring mechanisms from CEC in collaboration with other related institutions enabled by Electoral Code amendments” and “An easy-to-process reporting data will be offered by CEC to CSOs, media, and electoral researchers starting from 2025”
- Policy recommendation point (5) urges “for an increase of funding opportunities and grants for

[19]A comparison analysis has been conducted between the draft of the Functioning of Democratic Institutions Roadmap that has been published for consultation on the online consultation platform - <https://konsultimipublik.gov.al/Konsultime/Detaje/692> and the final version of this Roadmap prepared after the finishing of the consultation process (in which this WG session was part of) - https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ioa3FSeYpntRrHUlsYqnG2EqjwASMcD/edit?usp=drive_link&oid=111999003229908040714&rtpof=true&sd=true

CSOs (with a more significant role for the Agency for the Support of Civil Society)". The existing measure in the previous version of the roadmap included in the subfield: Civil Society has been updated in the final version as follows: "Administrative procedures of public funds and (public funds in general- not just the ones managed by the National Agency to Support Civil Society) the ASCS grant process improved within 2025 and public funding increased to enable CSOs to perform their roles of service providers."

Protection of children online from all forms of violence and abuse, 28 March 2024

The Roundtable for Chapter 23, held on 28 March 2024 within the Platform of Partnership for European Integration and the framework of the National Convention for European Integration, brought together a wide range of stakeholders – representatives of state institutions, civil society organizations, legal professionals, experts, and activists. The activity, organized by the Ministry of Justice and the European Movement in Albania and financed by the European Union, focused on the protection of children online from all forms of violence and abuse. Throughout the discussion, panel experts highlighted pressing challenges related to safeguarding children in the digital environment, emphasizing the growing risks of online exploitation, harmful content, and technology-enabled crimes against minors. The presentations underscored the need for stronger institutional cooperation, capacity-building, and comprehensive preventive measures to effectively address these threats and ensure a safer online space for all children.

The monitoring of recommendations on the protection of children in the digital environment is based on the review of the Annual Reports of the State Agency for the Rights and Protection of Children (ASHDMF) for the years 2023 and 2024. The 2023 report[20] provides a baseline of activities and initiatives prior to the recommendations issued in March 2024, while the 2024 report[21] reflects newly implemented activities, workshops, and institutional collaborations that were absent in the previous year. The monitoring focuses strictly on factual developments, such as the organization of awareness activities, participatory workshops, inter-institutional meetings, and submissions to relevant authorities, without assessing the impact or effectiveness of these measures.

Recommendation: Educate children on digital safety

"To prevent risk and harm to children online, it is recommended to inform and educate them about

[20] <https://femijet.gov.al/all/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Raport-v-jetor-i-punes-se-Ag-jencise-Shteterore-per-te-Drejtat-dhe-Mbrojtjen-e-Femijes-Viti-2023-.pdf>

[21] <https://femijet.gov.al/all/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Raport-v-jetor-i-punes-se-Ag-jencise-Shteterore-per-te-Drejtat-dhe-Mbrojtjen-e-Femijes-Viti-2024.pdf>

digital safety and how to protect themselves in risky situations. This can be achieved in collaboration with schools, teaching staff, and parents through awareness campaigns and activities."

Monitoring:

- 2023: Awareness activities were limited to advising parents to be informed and vigilant and to guide their children about digital risks. Children received counseling on how to report online abuse or bullying to trusted adults. No structured collaboration with schools or targeted educational programs was reported.
- 2024: Structured educational and awareness programs were organized in 11 municipalities (Tiranë, Durrës, Kukës, Gramsh, Cërrik, Lezhë, Kuçovë, Fier, Shkodër, Gjirokastër, Përmet, Berat), reaching 1277 children and 244 professionals (teachers, parents, psychosocial staff). Activities included individual and family counseling, guidance for parents on active supervision and open communication, and direct collaboration with schools to organize information and awareness sessions on online safety. These structured and school-based activities were not present in 2023.

Recommendation: Use innovative approaches and involve children directly

"It is suggested that a more innovative, clear, yet attractive approach be used, especially created for children and young people, to stimulate engagement in awareness campaigns. A positive practice is the direct involvement of children in carrying out these activities."

Monitoring:

- 2023: In 2023, no participatory or child-focused workshops were reported. Activities were limited to advising parents to be informed and vigilant and to guide their children about digital risks. Children received counseling on how to report online abuse or bullying to trusted adults. Additionally, in implementation of Law 18/2017 "On the Rights and Protection of the Child," ASHDMF and AKCESK discussed the need to institutionalize cooperation for raising awareness among children, communities, and professionals. Coordination meetings were held with professionals, including prosecutors and police, in the municipalities of Tiranë, Durrës, Elbasan, and Krujë. A total of 76 professionals participated in these meetings. There were no structured school-based activities, workshops, or direct involvement of children in 2023.
- 2024: In contrast, during 2024, structured educational and awareness activities were organized in 11 municipalities (Tiranë, Durrës, Kukës, Gramsh, Cërrik, Lezhë, Kuçovë, Fier, Shkodër, Gjirokastër, Përmet, and Berat), reaching 1277 children and 244 professionals, including teachers, parents, and psychosocial staff. Within these activities:
 - 33 school-based awareness and information sessions were conducted in nine-year and secondary schools, directly involving children in learning about online safety.
 - Four dedicated workshops for professionals and parents were held in Tiranë, Kukës, Durrës, and Cërrik, training 200 professionals and 43 parents.

- "Participants received guidance on reporting cases of online bullying, harassment, and blackmail, best practices for safe internet navigation, and the importance of inter-institutional cooperation for child protection in digital spaces.

These structured and participatory activities, including the direct involvement of children, were not reported in 2023 and represent a first-time implementation following the March 2024 recommendations.

Recommendation: Promote cooperative approaches between institutions, media, and service providers

“For this dynamic and highly sensitive field, a cooperative approach between state institutions and other involved actors is recommended, including close collaboration with media providers and internet service providers for monitoring content, filtering, and responding to complaints.”

Monitoring:

- 2023: No formal inter-institutional collaboration, media initiatives, or engagement with service providers were reported. The reports do not mention any structured coordination or formal guidance on ethical reporting or child protection in digital spaces.
- 2024: New institutional cooperation and media-related initiatives were introduced. ASHDMF actively participated in inter-institutional meetings aimed at improving media reporting quality and guaranteeing the protection of children’s rights. Key activities included:
 - Submission of formal recommendations to the Audiovisual Media Authority promoting ethical reporting and the protection of children, including:
 - Promoting positive and educational stories focused on children.
 - Use of sensitive and ethical language in reports involving children in difficult situations.
 - Development of awareness campaigns for journalists and media outlets.
 - Protection of children’s privacy and dignity, especially in cases involving violence, victimization, or trauma.
 - Dissemination of information on children’s rights through public and educational media programs.
 - Collaboration with schools, law enforcement, and partner organizations to ensure coordinated responses to digital risks and online abuse.

The Volunteering Law in Albania: As a priority for the Strengthening of the Civil Society’s Enabling Environment, 9 July 2024, 10:00 – 12:00[22]

[22] Analysis is based on the published Consultation Report from the Minister of State of Youth and Children: https://konsultimipublik.gov.al/documents/RENJK_800_Formati_-raporti-individual--i-Konsultimit-Publik-projektlig-ji-p-r-Vullnetarizmi.docx and the Draft Law on Volunteering: https://konsultimipublik.gov.al/documents/RENJK_800_Projektlig-ji-pe%CC%88r-vullnetarizmin.docx

The Minister of State for Youth and Children has initiated a drafting of the Volunteering Bill, aimed at supporting civil society actors, activists, youth and volunteer networks across the country. The objective of this proposed legislation is to address the challenges in the implementation of Law on Volunteering No.45/ 2016. These challenges have been brought forth by civil society organisations, who have also provided recommendations for enhancing the law to ensure its enforceability and to eliminate obstacles faced by CSOs. Reviewing the Law on Volunteering is a priority outlined in the Roadmap for the Functioning of Democratic Institutions, as it is a key benchmark for Cluster I, Fundamentals of the EU chapters related to the country's European integration. This review should be approved by 2025, with the aim to create a supportive environment for civil society, encouraging inclusive participation, effective cooperation and meaningful contributions of civil societies in the process. The draft law will propose amendments to the existing Law No.45/2016, with the first draft expected for public consultation in September 2024.

- Policy Recommendation on Definition of Volunteering: It is essential to clarify what constitutes volunteering, distinguishing it from activities that do not qualify as volunteering. The term “voluntary work” should be avoided and instead, volunteering should be defined as an act or action that does not invoke an employment relationship. A clear distinction must be made between social services or professional work practices, which should not be classified as volunteering. Additionally, the law should differentiate between structured volunteering and mass volunteering, without obstructing the latter with formal barriers and financial obligations for volunteers or and organisations. – fully addressed
- Policy Recommendation on Recognition of Skills: “The law should address the recognition of regulation of volunteering should consider broader national legal frameworks and other laws affecting or affected by volunteering, such as social and health insurance laws, employment laws, social services laws, youth laws and education laws.” – fully addressed
- Two policy Recommendations on Support from State Institutions: “Additional support and involvement from state institutions are vital for volunteering initiatives, as providing volunteer services is costly for organisations; therefore, it is recommended to:
 - -Establish a dedicated fund for volunteering and volunteering organisations, similar to Slovakia’s model, where an accreditation body recognises organisation meeting specific criteria and allowing them to access these funds.
 - -The state could cover health or work injury insurance for volunteers, thus easing the economic burden on volunteering organisations and encouraging more volunteer engagement.”- fully addressed
- Six Policy Recommendations on Obligations and Rights from the Contractual Relationship for Volunteering – fully addressed as follow:

-“The legal and contractual nature of the relationship between the Volunteer and the Volunteering Provider should be clarified, with the aim of specifying, above all, the respective tax obligations, contributions, etc., and the legal avoidance of these obligations. The volunteering relationship cannot be a work or service relationship.”;

-“It is recommended that agreements between the volunteer, the volunteering provider organization, and/or the beneficiary of the volunteering be as flexible as possible, with minimal bureaucracy and restrictions, and clearly outline the duties and rights of each party.”;

-“The provision of Article 16(2) should be removed from Law 45/2016. The conditions of contract invalidity should be identified and declared in accordance with the conditions and provisions of the Civil Code of the Republic of Albania.”;

-“The nature and type of insurance for Volunteers under Article 22 should also be clarified to facilitate the proper implementation of the law by all interested parties (so that clarification is not limited to an interpretation by a technical decision of the Tax Directorate - see recommendation 1 above). Volunteer insurance in the social security scheme for workplace accidents and retirement pensions seems appropriate in the volunteering relationship; this insurance can be provided by the state. The issue faced by the existing law is in cases where individuals who are simultaneously receiving social assistance engage as volunteers and are paid by the volunteer provider organization for social security, creating a problem for receiving social assistance, as in such a case, due to the ambiguity of the process and lack of system identification, they appear as employed. Thus, the situation is that individuals receiving social assistance risk losing this assistance when engaged as volunteers under the existing law.”;

“It is recommended that during the establishment of the contractual relationship between the volunteer and the offering organization and/or beneficiary, a guiding and informative document should be created to ensure protection against abuse and other risks that may arise during volunteer service, such as labour exploitation, verbal or physical violence, or the risk of harassment and sexual abuse. This is especially relevant when the agreement includes vulnerable categories such as minors, individuals with mental or physical health issues, marginalized groups, etc. “

-“More work is needed on raising awareness and informing individuals involved in voluntary service (both volunteers and beneficiaries) about the mechanisms for protecting their rights and how to proceed in case of problems to report or file complaints with the appropriate state authorities.”

- Policy Recommendation on Research on Volunteering: “There is a lack of studies on volunteering and accurate data on the number of organizations offering volunteering in the country, the number and type of volunteers, and other necessary information regarding volunteer contributions (type, duration, target groups, typology of volunteers and beneficiaries, main areas of volunteer contribution, etc.). These studies are considered important to understand the real state of volunteering in the country and to guide volunteering policies. Studies are recommended to be conducted by public institutions, in cooperation with civil society organizations, which can contribute in this area with their experience and capacities.” – fully addressed

- Four Policy Recommendations on Registering of Volunteers – fully addressed

-“The legal regulation of volunteering and, in particular, the use of the Volunteer Register should function to assess the contribution of volunteers to society and avoid the potential misuse of the Register's information for financial, fiscal, etc., burdens on Volunteers and Offering Organizations. The law should clearly define the purpose and function of the Register. Thus, if such a register is to be established, a detailed and comprehensive analysis of its purpose, utility, and benefits for the volunteering process is recommended.”

-“Registering volunteers in an online register adds additional costs to organizations in terms of time, human resources, and finances. This becomes particularly difficult in the case of mass volunteering campaigns. This administrative burden may be unbearable for a large number of organizations, reducing their incentive to offer volunteering due to bureaucratic obstacles.”

-“It is recommended to consider that for the establishment of such a register, there must also be a good mechanism to protect and prevent the misuse of personal data held by this register. Given the the high risk of cybercrime and past cases where citizens' personal data were not protected and were published and misused, this is an important element that must be considered in the creation of the national online volunteer register.”

The national online register may not be necessary if all organizations have their own internal documents and procedures regarding volunteer registration and data maintenance, such as: internal registers of organizations, minutes, participant lists, certificates, participation confirmations, or reference letters, or agreements and contracts concluded between organizations and volunteers. All these documents can serve as proof of the volunteer service and the volunteers involved in the organization.”

Each one's Integration in Europe - Protecting Fundamental Rights and Marginalized Communities, May 14, 2024

On May 14, 2024, the European Movement in Albania, in cooperation with the Pro LGBT organization, organized a table discussion under the National Convention for European Integration framework, focusing on the integration of all individuals in Albania and Europe and the protection of fundamental rights, particularly for marginalized communities. The event addressed issues related to human rights, with special attention to the challenges faced by the LGBTQIA+ community in Albania. The discussion emphasized the importance of full protection and promotion

of fundamental rights, the dismantling of discriminatory practices, and creating an environment where all individuals can live openly and authentically. Participants highlighted the need for comprehensive legal reforms, effective implementation of existing laws, and social acceptance, along with the vital role of civil society in monitoring and advocating for these rights. The activity provided a platform for dialogue among civil society organizations, experts, activists, and state institutions, reinforcing the importance of collaboration to advance human rights protections and achieve European Union standards for marginalized groups.

Policy recommendations: “The European Union has recently adopted two Directives to guarantee the standards of equality bodies with the main purpose of strengthening the competences of equality bodies to fight discrimination in the fields of employment and social security, but also to increase their independence, to increase human and technical resources and empower them in the direction of dispute resolution in cases of discrimination. For this, the Albanian state is encouraged to take the necessary measures to align the Albanian legislation with these directives to make it possible for the equality bodies in the country, such as the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination, to strengthen their capacities, role and independence in line with the new directives of EU. “

and

“The Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination and the Ombudsperson, as the two main bodies in Albania for the protection of human rights, despite the good work done over the years, still encounter difficulties in terms of strengthened human capacities, financial resources and infrastructure for the full completion of approved Strategies or Action Plans. The inclusion of Albania in the CERV mechanism as well as the technical assistance being offered by TAIEX is positively evaluated, but such programs and support should be more numerous and sustainable to ensure that these bodies fully fulfil their role and responsibilities that they hold in these fields” emphasize the need to “strengthen the capacities, independence, and resources of the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination (CPD) and the Ombudsperson,” as the principal institutions responsible for the protection of fundamental rights and the enforcement of anti-discrimination measures, including those affecting marginalized communities such as LGBTI persons. The recommendations highlight the importance of enhancing human and technical capacities, securing sustainable financial resources, and expanding institutional mandates to enable these bodies to fully implement approved strategies, issue guidance, and respond effectively to violations of rights.

These recommendations are reflected in the recently approved Gender Balance Law, which introduces provisions aimed at reinforcing the supervisory, advisory, and monitoring powers of the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination. Specifically, the law obliges public institutions to adopt equality policies, implement measures preventing harassment and discrimination, report on progress, and cooperate with equality bodies. The Commissioner is granted enhanced authority to review institutional practices, provide recommendations to ensure compliance with equality standards, and follow up on corrective actions. While the law primarily targets gender equality, its

strengthened mechanisms are cross-cutting and cover all protected grounds, including sexual orientation and gender identity. This linkage ensures that measures designed to promote gender balance also reinforce the institutional protection of LGBTI persons and other marginalised groups, supporting more comprehensive and consistent responses to discrimination, harassment, or unequal treatment in public institutions, workplaces, and other sectors.

The full realization of these recommendations will depend on the law's implementation and its bylaws, the allocation of sufficient human and financial resources, the establishment of clear operational procedures, and continued political and institutional support to guarantee the independence and effectiveness of the CPD and Ombudsperson in practice.

Presentation of Cross-Cutting Strategy on Justice[23], 02 October 2024

On October 2, 2024, at the Tirana International Hotel, the Ministry of Justice, in collaboration with the European Movement in Albania (EMA), organized a consultative meeting as part of the National Convention on European Integration and the Partnership Platform for European Integration under Chapter 23. This activity resulted from a significant and positive development, namely the drafting of the Cross-cutting Justice Strategy, in accordance with the obligations arising from Albania's integration process into the EU, which brought together around 40 representatives from civil society and academia. The Strategy includes the most important objectives and expected results planned to be achieved within the next seven years.

- Policy recommendation “...to complete the regulatory acts for the functioning of two important justice system bodies: the High Judicial Council (HJC) and the High Prosecutorial Council (HPC), which until now have operated without such a comprehensive legal basis,” has been addressed in the strategy, specifically in measure 1.1.10, which relates to making legislative changes to ensure efficiency in terms of human resources in courts and prosecution offices. This measure is further detailed through concrete activities aimed at its implementation.
- Policy Recommendation “Mediation measures should be more proactive, focusing not only on information and awareness campaigns for citizens but also on intensifying the court referral system to encourage citizens to consider alternative dispute resolution through mediation

[23]Analysis is based on the published Consultation Report from the Minister of Justice: https://www.konsultimipublik.gov.al/documents/RENJK_780_Raporti-i-konsultimit-publik-strategjia-2024_Final.docx-16.12.2024.docx and the Draft Cross-Cutting Strategy: https://www.konsultimipublik.gov.al/documents/RENJK_780_Dokument-Konsultativ.docx and https://www.konsultimipublik.gov.al/documents/RENJK_780_Strategjia-Nd-rsektorale-e-Drejt-sis-2024-2030-Final.docx

- whenever possible,” has been addressed in the strategy, which aims, among other things, to improve the referral mechanism for alternative dispute resolution, strengthen the role of mediation and the courts in this field, and increase awareness and the number of mediation service cases among the general public. Transparency in licensing procedures will be enhanced to encourage an increase in the number of mediators, and parties will be informed about mediation options in line with legal provisions. This process will be monitored and evaluated by relevant institutions such as the HJC and the High Inspectorate of Justice (HIJ) to ensure that proper standards and practices are upheld, contributing to the reduction of court workloads and costs. Therefore, concrete measures/activities have been planned for their realization, including measure 3.4.3, which pertains to the legal obligation of courts to properly inform parties about the possibility of mediation, as assessed by the HJC in performance evaluations.
- Policy recommendation “...the budget for free legal aid should be reviewed to align with the actual needs and demands of the beneficiary categories, with a thorough analysis of their situation,” has been addressed in the strategy, as the law “On State-Guaranteed Legal Aid” aims to create a system for organizing and providing free legal aid to ensure equal access to justice for all individuals; to ensure the proper organization, administration, and functioning of the responsible state institutions; and to provide professional, high-quality, efficient, and effective legal aid services.
- Policy recommendation “...the budget for free legal aid should be reviewed to align with the actual needs and demands of the beneficiary categories, with a thorough analysis of their situation,” has been addressed in the strategy, as the law “On State-Guaranteed Legal Aid” aims to create a system for organizing and providing free legal aid to ensure equal access to justice for all individuals; to ensure the proper organization, administration, and functioning of the responsible state institutions; and to provide professional, high-quality, efficient, and effective legal aid services. For this purpose, the strategy has foreseen measures to enhance human and infrastructural capacities for the proper functioning of the Free Legal Aid Directorate (FLAD), as well as a review of the regulatory framework to improve citizens' access to free legal aid.
- Policy Recommendation “It has been observed with concern that prosecutors have dropped or not initiated cases against judges or prosecutors, providing unfounded justifications, leading to the expiration of criminal prosecution deadlines. This issue should be prioritized.” The strategy includes measure 1.2.4, which mandates that prosecutorial services proactively initiate criminal proceedings against judges and prosecutors whose vetting process has revealed potential criminal elements. The strategy seeks to enhance accountability and transparency in the justice system by ensuring that such individuals face prosecution, strengthening public trust, and preventing future abuses.
- Policy Recommendation “to prioritize digitalization efforts in the justice system to improve online service delivery and explore the potential for online court hearings”, has been addressed in specific objective 3.5, which aims to increase efficiency in courts and prosecution offices

- through information and communication technology (ICT). The strategy outlines concrete measures to achieve digitalization through staffing, capacity-building, legal changes, inter-institutional cooperation, and securing the necessary budgets.
- Policy Recommendation “to integrate the Integrated Case Management System (ICMS) with other relevant databases to facilitate information sharing”, has been addressed in the strategy, as the ICMS aims to interconnect with other justice systems to provide improved service delivery and information sharing across platforms.
- Policy Recommendation “to ensure feedback and transparency in the consultation process, the Ministry of Justice has established long-standing experience in strategic document drafting, following a transparent and inclusive process”. For every suggestion received from civil society, the ministry provides official responses regarding their inclusion or exclusion, with appropriate justifications.
- Three Policy Recommendations: "Cooperation with civil society should be structured and formalized to clarify roles and expected contributions."; "Civil society organizations (CSOs) should be involved as watchdogs to monitor the strategy in areas where they have expertise."; "Direct communication between CSOs and justice institutions should be facilitated by the Ministry of Justice to inform and coordinate joint activities"- Ministry of Justice maintains a well-established relationship with CSOs in the justice sector. The ministry includes them in discussions and meetings and values their expertise in shaping strategic documents. Collaboration has grown steadily over the years, and the strategy foresees further joint activities under measure 5.2.3 to strengthen cooperation and enhance citizen awareness of the justice system.

Justice Reform in Progress: The Role of the School of Magistrates and Judicial Integrity in the EU accession process, 20 June 2025

On June 20, 2025, a roundtable on Chapter 23 – Judiciary and Fundamental Rights was held in Tirana, focusing on the role of the School of Magistrates and strengthening judicial integrity in Albania. The event brought together representatives from the School of Magistrates, civil society actors, and foreign missions to discuss the importance of ethics, transparency, and professional training in building a credible and accountable judiciary. Participants examined reforms in entry and training processes at the School of Magistrates, emphasizing anonymous examinations, integrity checks, psychological assessments, and curriculum adjustments designed to expose future magistrates to ethical dilemmas and real-world challenges. International experiences, notably from Slovakia, highlighted the risks of formal reforms without a solid ethical foundation, stressing that

lasting judicial integrity requires both systemic changes and a culture of ethics. Discussions also covered the methodology for selecting candidates, the relevance of vetting processes, and the importance of EU best practices in guiding reforms. Overall, the roundtable underscored that sustainable judicial reform depends on embedding ethics and integrity throughout the judiciary, from entry-level magistrates to institutional practices, ensuring transparency, accountability, and professionalism across the system.

Recommendation: Ethics should not be treated as an external add-on but as part of a judge's professional identity, while training and capacity building on integrity should be continuous. Judicial schools should integrate ethics modules not only at entry-level training but throughout a judge's career, reinforcing reflection and peer dialogue.

Feedback / Analysis:

This is directly linked within the framework of Interim Benchmarks for Chapter 23 – Improved quality of the judiciary, which aim to enhance judicial capacity, reduce evaluation backlogs, improve the quality and integrity of teaching staff, and ensure timely publication of reasoned decisions, SoM has focused on embedding integrity and professional ethics across its training programs. Ethics is now systematically included in entry-level and continuous training, emphasizing reflection, peer dialogue, and the development of a judge's professional identity. SoM's work on this benchmark specifically addresses the education and integrity component, contributing to broader judicial reforms.

Recommendation: Organisation of regular training and workshops that also include case-based discussions: e.g., a new judge whose family members are lawyers, or a judge asked to join a politically sensitive demonstration.

Feedback / Analysis:

Training programs have been revised to include practical, scenario-based exercises that reflect real-life ethical dilemmas and professional challenges. These exercises cover both civil and criminal cases, allowing judges to apply ethical reasoning in context. The integration of integrity and ethics into these discussions ensures that participants not only receive theoretical guidance but also practice making informed, principled decisions in situations they are likely to encounter during their judicial careers.

Recommendation: Facilitating mentorship programs where senior judges, experts from academia and CSOs, and counterparts from the region and EU offer their expertise and mentor especially early-stage magistrates. In Sweden, for example, judicial training encourages judges to ask themselves key ethical questions before acting.

Feedback / Analysis:

A new mentorship program has been introduced, aiming and planning to connect early-stage

magistrates with senior judges, academic experts, CSOs, and regional/EU counterparts. This program incorporates innovative tools such as peer evaluations and non-formal learning methods, encouraging participants to critically reflect on ethical questions before taking decisions. This broader professional engagement supports the development of practical skills, ethical judgment, and professional confidence among new judges.

Summary:

All three recommendations are closely linked to SoM's ongoing work on judicial training and professional development and are integrated into its curriculum and programs. SoM's efforts demonstrate clear progress in addressing the integrity and ethics components highlighted in the recommendations. While further improvements remain necessary, including a comprehensive revision of entry exams and continuous training curricula, also the European Commission Report of 2024 confirms that significant steps have been taken since 2023 to strengthen the training system, professional ethics, and mentorship opportunities within the judiciary.

ADDRESSED RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHAPTER 24

Roadmap for Rule of Law - Priorities regarding Chapter 24 according to the Rule of Law Roadmap, 07 December 2023

The first session of the WG for Chapter 24 – Justice, Freedom, Security has been organized by European Movement Albania in cooperation with Ministry of Interior of Albania. This session took place while the work on the Rule of Law Roadmap was undergoing (a draft had already been prepared and published for consultations) but the activity objective was to offer the opportunity to CSOs and other actors to provide their policy recommendations and suggestions for the measures foreseen by this Roadmap, as this strategic document was yet to be finalized. It is observed that some of the recommendations extracted during this Session of the Working Group for Chapter 24 have been included on the updated Rule of Law Roadmap. More specifically:

- Policy Recommendation point (6) that emphasizes the “strengthening of cooperation, coordination and exchange of experiences and information between law enforcement institutions, police structures, the judicial system and the prosecution for a proper synchronization of tasks and procedures, in order to achieve timely concrete results without impediments” it is included as one of the measures to be taken under the subfield Fight against organized crime of the updated Rule of Law Roadmap: “Ensure closer and more effective inter-institutional coordination, notably among law enforcement agencies (LEA), and between LEA and prosecution.”
- Policy Recommendation point (1) focused on the increase of the capacities of State Police in Albania explaining in more details which should be the priorities for strengthening their capacities namely: “-raising the capacities of the staff through various trainings and programs, -increased cooperation with their counterparts in Member States, but also with the institutions and agencies of the EU; -improving technology and setting up digital systems to have more effectiveness and real-time results during their work” has also been included in the subfield Fight against organized crime of the updated Rule of Law Roadmap: “Capacitate law enforcement to implement special investigative measures or new technologies”.

Management of irregular migration and cooperation with frontex – main priorities under the National Strategy for Migration 2024-2030 framework, 31 January 2024

The session 2 of the WG for Chapter 24 was organized on 31 January 2024 focused on irregular migration in Albania, under the New Status Agreement with Frontex and introducing of the National Strategy for Migration 2024-2030.

- Policy recommendation point (6) highlights the risk analysis and risk assessment when it comes to managing of irregular migration and border control. This procedure is recommended to be implemented through collaboration and information exchange with Frontex and other EU Members States as stipulated by Policy recommendation point (7). In the updated Rule of Law Roadmap in the subfield of Visa Policy a new measure is added that is aligned with these recommendations: “Conduct a periodic assessment of the situation and risks of abuse of visa-free regime for nationals of third countries which are required a visa to enter the EU, based on national data, as well as information provided by Frontex and the EU Member States’ authorities”.

ADRESSED RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHAPTER 5

In the context of the roundtables held by the working groups within the framework of the National Convention on European Integration, and their synergy with the Partnership Platform for European Integration, recommendations derived from these roundtables, presented in the section above, are intended to provide solutions and updates of policies and reforms being developed in Albania, or possible alternatives for future policies. Therefore, it is very important to carry out a follow-up process to understand at what level these recommendations are being considered and which issues are currently being addressed.

Working Group for Chapter 5 – Public Procurement – Main issues and involvement of civil society actors, 7 December 2023

This roundtable for Chapter 5 – Public Procurement titled “Main issues and involvement of civil society actors” in the framework of the establishment of the Discussion and Consultation Roundtables under the Partnership Platform for European Integration was held in Tirana jointly convened by the European Movement in Albania, and the Agency for Public Procurement, as the central body responsible for the well-going of the public procurement system in Albania. The purpose of this roundtable was to present the public procurement as the regime that can provide for transparency, equal treatment, free competition and non-discrimination in its general principles, to highlight the alignment process of the Albanian legal framework vis-à-vis the EU acquis, and to introduce the public call for membership into the Chapter 5 Roundtable within PPIE as well to further establish this roundtable.

- Recommendation no.1, from the insights gathered during this roundtable, to continue the work and uphold transparency on “aligning the domestic legal framework with the EU Acquis and the relevant Directives and Regulations for this field” has been recognized, as there are continuous efforts to revise the Law 125/2013 “On Concessions and Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs)”. Meanwhile, the Law on Concessions and Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) was approved in 2013, undergoing subsequent amendments over time. The legal gap analysis (LGA) conducted by SIGMA, in collaboration with the Public Procurement Agency and the Concessions Treatment Agency, plays a crucial role in pinpointing laws that are either partially aligned or completely unaligned with the EU acquis.
- Recommendation no. 2 is partially met. In the context of the European integration negotiation process, full administrative capacity is required, and responsibility has been taken to address this. In this regard, a new body has been established, the Centralised Purchasing Operator, through DCM No. 531, dated 7.9.2023, “On the establishment of the state joint-stock company Centralised Purchasing Operator for carrying out special public procurement procedures on behalf of the Prime Minister’s Office, ministries, and subordinate institutions.”
- Recommendation no. 3 to adopt a new National Strategy for Public Procurement after the completion of duration of the Strategy for the period 2020-2023 is addressed with the new National Strategy for Public Procurement adopted with the Council of Ministers Decision no.304, dated 22.5.2024.
- Recommendation no. 4, which states that “the new Strategy should have clear and achievable objectives for the planned period, with particular attention to budgetary considerations and human resources,” is addressed. The strategy already specifies a budget table, where 93.23% of the projected costs are allocated to achieving Policy Objective 2 – Environmentally, Socially, and Innovatively Sustainable Procurement.[24]

[24] Official Gazette of the Republic of Albania no. 89, DCM no. 304 “On the approval of the National Strategy for Public Procurement 2024–2030 and its Action Plan for implementation 2024–2027”, dated 22.5.2024, pg. 10154. <https://www.qbz.gov.al/eli/fz/2024/89/1961ec46-defd-44fb-878f-669ff7901820?q=Strategjia%20per%20Prokurimin%20Publik>

- At the same time, nearly half of the activity plan: 58% (14 out of 24 activities) is expected to be carried out using the internal human and administrative capacities of the institutional structures involved in implementation, while 10 activities will require the mobilisation of additional financial and human resources.[25]
- Recommendation no. 5, which calls for the strategy to be coordinated with other institutions, is met. In both its drafting and implementation, APP has involved a range of institutions, including the Public Procurement Commission, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Infrastructure and Energy, the Ministry of Defense, the Concessions Treatment Agency (ATRAKO), and the Central Purchasing Agency, among others. Furthermore, the strategy foresees the establishment of a dedicated committee for its coordination and management.[26]
- Recommendation no. 6 underscores the inclusive approach in soliciting input from a diverse array of stakeholders for the drafting of New National Strategy for Public Procurement spanning 2024-2030, alongside its Action Plan for 2024-2027 as “Involvement of non-state actors, such as civil society experts, business sector representatives, trade chambers, academic staff in the High Education Institutions and interest groups, is key for consulting and discussing this draft strategic document along its compilation and final approval”. The Draft National Strategy for Public Procurement 2024-2030 was discussed with these stakeholders during a roundtable session held on January 16th, 2024. To ensure transparency and gather diverse perspectives, the Draft National Strategy underwent a public consultation process. As the present recommendation highlights “Inclusion can occur through physical public meetings or online participation via the Electronic Register for Public Consultation and correspondence via email”, the Draft National Strategy was made accessible on the main website of the Public Procurement Agency and the electronic register for notifications and public consultations as well.
- Recommendation no. 7 for the Agency of Public Procurement “The roundtable for Chapter 5 should be active and convened at least once a month, as stipulated in the relevant order for the establishment and functioning of the Partnership Platform for European Integration” is being duly considered, underscoring the importance of consistent engagement and regular activity of the roundtable for Chapter 5. Following the initial roundtable on December 7th, subsequent session was convened on January 16th, 2024, in accordance with this recommendation. Other roundtables have taken place such as Revision of the Law "On Concessions and Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs)", and best European practices on 29 February 2024; Roundtable on New National Strategy for Public Procurement 2024-2030 and its Action Plan 2024-2027 on 19 September 2024, and on Meeting the provisional closing benchmarks within the accession negotiations framework on 10 June 2025. Organising these roundtable discussions continuously is essential for fostering collaboration, sharing insights, and addressing pertinent issues related to Chapter 5 effectively.

[25] Official Gazette of the Republic of Albania no. 89, DCM no. 304 "On the approval of the National Strategy for Public Procurement 2024–2030 and its Action Plan for implementation 2024–2027", dated 22.5.2024, pg. 10154. <https://www.qbz.gov.al/eli/fz/2024/89/1961ec46-defd-44fb-878f-669ff7901820?q=Strategjia%20per%20Prokurimin%20Publik>

[26] Ibid, pg. 10139.

- Recommendation No. 8, which states that “the selected discussion topics should align with recent developments in the field of Public Procurement and be based on the requirements and criteria identified during the screening process for this chapter,” has been addressed in all roundtables held to date by the Agency for Public Procurement. For example, this includes discussions on the new National Strategy as it was being consulted with different actors, and to meet the European integration process requirements, the roundtable on fulfilling provisional closing benchmarks was held.
- Recommendation no. 9 for the Public Procurement Agency advocating “Institutional transparency for sharing all necessary documents, materials, and information with roundtable members is very significant to keep them informed in a timely manner about ongoing developments and topics for discussion” is being rigorously taken into consideration. This encompasses providing presentations and disseminating key documents such as the Draft National Strategy on Public Procurement 2024-2030 and the National Plan for European Integration 2024-2026 (with a key focus to Chapter 5 priorities) to roundtable members and other participants. This commitment to institutional transparency not only ensures that all stakeholders are well-informed but also fosters an environment based on constructive dialogue.
- Recommendation no. 10, which states that recommendations should be discussed and followed up, has been partially addressed through the holding of roundtables and subsequent discussions. However, the recommendations from these roundtables should also be published on the official website for greater transparency.
- Recommendation no. 12, regarding the active participation of Discussion and Consultation members for Chapter 5, is partially met. While members have contributed verbally to discussions and recommendations have incorporated their input, not all members have consistently attended the roundtables. The sessions have also been enriched by the participation of other actors who are not officially members.

Founding Roundtable of the Partnership Platform for Chapter 5 – Public Procurement held on January 16th, 2024

The table below serves as a tool to monitor the recommendations made during the discussions of the Roundtable of Chapter 5 - Public Procurement - Session II, on the topic "Founding Roundtable of the Partnership Platform for Chapter 5 - Public Procurement", held on January 16, 2024. During this roundtable, two strategic documents were presented, namely the Draft National Strategy for Public Procurement 2024-2030 and its Action Plan 2024-2027, as well as the National Plan for European Integration 2024-2026 focusing on objectives and strategies for Chapter 5.

The main components of the following table are:

·**Recommendation**: summarizes the proposed action or amendment that was discussed during the roundtable.

·**Addressing status in the NPPS 2024-2030**: Indicates whether the recommendation has been accepted in the national strategy, using options such as "Yes," "No," or "Partially."

·**Comments/Justifications**: present additional context regarding the inclusion or exclusion of recommendations, explaining the reasons behind the decisions; necessary actions to advance the implementation of recommendations, or possible barriers such as time period, budget plan, inter-institutional communication, etc.

Nr.	Recommendations from the Roundtable of Chapter 5, Session II	Addressing status in the NPPS 2024-2030	Comments/Justifications
1	the compilation of new legal packages in the field of public procurement not only in accordance with European standards, but also taking into consideration the Albanian context, such as the case of subcontracting up to 50% in order to minimise liability	YES	<p>The given recommendation has been taken into account in NPPS 2024-2030 and specifically in:</p> <p>Policy Goal 1. Efficient and effective procurement process</p> <p><u>Objective 1.1. Further improvement of the legal framework</u></p> <p>Activity 1.1.2. Review of by-laws in accordance with the public procurement law</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis of legislation; • Compatibility table; • Drafting and approval of amendments to la no. 162/2020, "On public procurement" in the Assembly;
2	active participation of non state actors in awareness raising activities organised not only by APP, but also by other responsible institutions, mainly within the framework of Integrity Plans	YES	<p>The given recommendation was taken into account in the NPPS 2024-2030 and specifically in:</p> <p>Purpose of the Policy 1. Efficient and effective procurement process:</p> <p><u>Objective 1.4 Strengthening implementation capacities</u></p> <p>Activity 1.4.2. Raising awareness:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publication of instructions, recommendations, announcements, and guides on the APP website • Drafting and publication on the APP website of the commentary to the law no. 162/2020;

Nr.	Recommendations from the Roundtable of Chapter 5, Session II	Addressing status in the NPPS 2024-2030	Comments/Justifications
2		YES	<p>Policy Goal 2. Sustainable and innovative procurement <u>Objective 2.2. Improving the electronic procurement system</u> Activity 2.2.1. Improvements to the legal basis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drafting and approval of legal and bylaw acts. • Publication on the APP website of various manuals related to the use of advanced artificial intelligence technology and robotic processes; <p>as well as in</p> <p>Policy Goal 3. Integrity and legality of public procurements <u>Objective 3.1. Ensuring integrity in the public procurement process</u> Activity 3.1.1. Organisation of awareness events</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organisation of 2 meetings with the aim of raising capacities and awareness for integrity in the field of public procurement; • Organisation of 2 awareness events on deals in offers. • Training of 50 employees on integrity.
3	<p>involvement of civil society actors on issuing new acts intended to improve the process transparency and to inform them starting from the announcement up to the contraction of public procurement processes in order to play the role of a "watchdog" group</p>	YES	<p>The given recommendation was taken into account in the NPPS 2024-2030 and specifically in: Purpose of the Policy 1. Efficient and effective procurement process <u>Objective 1.4. Strengthening of implementation capacities</u> Activity 1.4.2. Raising Awareness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publication of instructions, recommendations, announcements, and guides on the APP website • Drafting and publication on the APP website of the commentary to the law no. 162/2020

Nr.	Recommendations from the Roundtable of Chapter 5, Session II	Addressing status in the NPPS 2024-2030	Comments/Justifications
3		YES	<p>as well as in Policy Goal 3. Integrity and legality of public procurements</p> <p><u>Objective 3.2. Legal security of complaints review</u></p> <p>Activity 3.2.1. Increasing capacities for reviewing complaints</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organisation of 5 trainings • Approval of the special training manual on an annual level, with higher education institutions and international partners • Organisation of 3 trainings with economic operators and contracting authorities related to the problems found during the examination of complaints, with the aim of solving them
4	<p>continuation of the implementation of Integrity Plans by other accountable institutions as well, except ministries, ensuring a wide scope of integrity security, since the risk of corruption is felt significantly in public procurement processes</p>	YES	<p>The given recommendation was taken into account in the NPPS 2024-2030 and specifically in: Purpose of Policy 3. Integrity and legality of public procurement</p> <p><u>Specific objective 3.1. Ensuring Integrity in the Public Procurement process.</u></p> <p>Activity 3.1.3. Inter-institutional cooperation for the fight against corruption.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cooperation agreement between the ministry responsible for anti-corruption and the Public Procurement Agency. • Drafting in cooperation with the ministry responsible for anti-corruption the integrity model plan for all authorities.
5	<p>organising activities in cooperation with the High Inspectorate for the Declaration and Audit of Assets and Conflicts of Interest</p>	YES	<p>The given recommendation was taken into account in the NPPS 2024-2030 and specifically in: Purpose of Policy 3. Integrity and legality of public procurement</p> <p><u>Specific objective 3.1. Ensuring Integrity in the Public Procurement process</u></p>

Nr.	Recommendations from the Roundtable of Chapter 5, Session II	Addressing status in the NPPS 2024-2030	Comments/Justifications
5	(HIDAACI) and the drafting of joint recommendations between HIDAACI and PPA, in the fields of interest on public procurement sensitive issues	YES	<p>Activities 3.1.2. Preparation of materials for raising awareness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Joint APP - HIDAACI document on the integrity of employees in public procurement.
6	organisation of future informative sessions focusing in avoidance of underhanded offers in cooperation with the Albanian Competition Authority (ACA)	YES	<p>The given recommendation was taken into account in the NPPS 2024-2030 and specifically in: Purpose of Policy 3. Integrity and legality of public procurement</p> <p><u>Specific objective 1. Ensuring Integrity in the Public Procurement process</u></p> <p>Activity 3.1.1. Organization of awareness events:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organisation of 2 meetings with the aim of raising capacities and awareness for integrity in the field of public procurement:-Organisation of 2 awareness events on bids deals. Training of 50 employees on integrity.
7	increased contracting authority facilitation of public procurement procedures using the electronic procurement system, which interconnects all the PP's systems, and two concurrent plans are highlighted: substantive changes implying adjustments as a result of the system interaction with the economic operators to increase the exposure to higher control measures, as well as technical system changes with the addition of functionalities such as red flags, which signal corruptive practices, in order to	YES	<p>The given recommendation was taken into account in NPPS 2024-2030 and specifically in: Policy Goal 2. Sustainable and innovative procurement</p> <p><u>Specific objective 2.2. Improvement of the procurement system</u></p> <p>Activity 2.2.1. Improvements to the legal basis:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Drafting and approval of legal and bylaw acts. Publication on the APP website of various manuals related to the use of advanced artificial intelligence technology and robotic processes <p>Activity 2.2.2. Improvement of the electronic procurement system:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Drafting and approval of legal and bylaw acts. Publication on the APP website of various

Nr.	Recommendat-ions from the Roundtable of Chapter 5, Session II	Addressing status in the NPPS 2024-2030	Comments/Justifications
7	to bring improvement of the overall procurement system in Albania	YES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • manuals related to the use of advanced artificial intelligence technology and robotic processes • The interaction of the electronic procurement system with other public systems; • Connection with e-procurement system and use of the contract management system; • RED FLAGS / Adding red flag functionality to the Electronic Procurement System to avoid corrupt practices; • Adding functionality to the system to highlight the use of environmental and social criteria. • Using advanced artificial intelligence technology and robotic processes • Establishment of the "e-Catalogue" system (Electronic Catalogue)

New National Strategy for Public Procurement 2024-2030 and its Action Plan 2024-2027 held on September 19th, 2024

The main objective of holding this Roundtable was to facilitate the exchange of views and suggestions to enhance the effectiveness of implementing the vision and objectives of the National Strategy for Public Procurement 2024-2030 and its Action Plan for implementation 2024-2027, approved by Decision No. 304, dated May 22, 2024, "On the approval of the National Strategy for Public Procurement 2024–2030 and its Action Plan for implementation 2024–2027." In this light, the following recommendations were addressed upon holding this roundtable:

- Recommendation No.2 specifically that regular evaluation of the National Strategy and its Action Plan, should be in place, and that “monitoring reports should be published on the official website and accompanied by informative campaigns to inform stakeholder groups”, has been largely addressed by the Agency for Public Procurement (APP). With the approval of the new Strategy through Council of Ministers Decision no. 304, dated 22.05.2025, and the publication of the annual Monitoring Report (Jan–Dec 2024) on its official website[27], the APP demonstrates that the evaluation mechanism is functioning. The monitoring indicators are systematically organised by objective, activity, and key performance indicator (KPI). For both 2024 and the first half of 2025 (January – June), the evaluation concluded that 5 out of 6 KPIs were achieved, while one indicator (KPI 5 – increased use of environmental and social criteria) lacked sufficient data. The report also provides a breakdown for each policy objective, specifying whether the planned activities were fully achieved, partially met, or not met. However, while the report is available to the public, it is less clear to what extent informative campaigns have been carried out to actively disseminate the findings and engage diverse stakeholder groups, despite numerous awareness-raising activities that have already been carried out under Specific Objective 3.1: Ensuring integrity in the public procurement process. The monitoring report for the second half of the year is still pending publication, suggesting that the objective may be further addressed in subsequent reporting periods.
- 1.Recommendation no.5 “to improve and optimise the public procurement system in Albania, inter-institutional cooperation must be strengthened by engaging important institutions” is addressed.
- a) With regard to cooperation with the Competition Authority, there is documented evidence of formal collaboration, including a longstanding memorandum of understanding between the two institutions. The Annual Report 2024[28] notes that the APP referred two cases to the Competition Authority for investigation, as potential indications of collusive bidding.

[27] For further information on the monitoring report, please see at <https://www.app.gov.al/GetData/DownloadDoc?documentId=605f49e6-2834-4e4f-8695-882a2b0cbbde>

[28] Agency for Public Procurement. Annual Report 2024 "Achievements – Priorities 2025", pg. 215.. <https://www.app.gov.al/GetData/DownloadDoc?documentId=4a9ddc1c-a89f-4862-afc4-d4884a3a2102>

- In addition, the 2024 Monitoring Report of the National Strategy for Public Procurement 2024-2030 highlights that the Competition Authority has organised a series of workshops focused on promoting competition, further reinforcing cooperation in this area.[29]
- b) Since APP approved a verification plan in May 2025 related to canceled procedures, highlighting the respective contracting authorities, details of the canceled procedures (object, estimated budget, type of procedure, references in the electronic procurement system, number of bidders, etc.), and the reasons for cancellation, it has communicated and collaborated with the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, based on statistical data showing that the health sector recorded the highest number of canceled procurement procedures during 2024.[30]
- c) Regarding AKSHI (National Agency for Information Society), cooperation on the e-procurement system continues with APP. Referring to the cooperation agreement (SLA) between AKSHI and APP, as well as Contract No. 64 dated 30.07.2023 signed between AKSHI and the maintenance company for the “Maintenance of the Electronic Procurement System,” APP has taken steps to address the issues identified in the maintenance company’s recommendations, within the scope of its competencies.[31] Additionally, concerning the new public procurement system, work has continued on drafting the terms of reference by AKSHI, with APP collaborating by providing input on the system’s needs and the specific elements it should include.[32]
- Recommendation no. 6 is partially met. The professionalism of the administration has improved through cooperation with the Academy of Political Studies and Administration (ASPA) and the Directorate of Public Administration (DAP). A Joint Instruction for an Amendment, dated 30/05/2025, to the Joint Instruction between APP, ASPA, and DAP “On the determination of procedures and criteria for organising training, testing, and issuing certificates in the field of public procurement,” dated 23/12/2024, has been approved.[33]

[29] Agency for Public Procurement. National Strategy for Public Procurement 2024-2030, Monitoring Report January – December 2024, Tirana, 2025, pg. 36. <https://www.app.gov.al/GetData/DownloadDoc?documentId=605f49e6-2834-4e4f-8695-882a2b0cbbde>

[30] Agency for Public Procurement. National Strategy for Public Procurement 2024-2030, Monitoring Report January – June 2025, Tirana, 2025, pg. 45. <https://www.app.gov.al/GetData/DownloadDoc?documentId=53a7e7e9-3ec2-45d8-9913-cc19e4586400>

[31] Agency for Public Procurement. Annual Report 2024 “Achievements – Priorities 2025”, pg. 175., <https://www.app.gov.al/GetData/DownloadDoc?documentId=4a9ddc1c-a89f-4862-afc4-d4884a3a2102>

[32] Agency for Public Procurement. National Strategy for Public Procurement 2024-2030, Monitoring Report January – December 2024, Tirana, 2025, pg. 8. <https://www.app.gov.al/GetData/DownloadDoc?documentId=605f49e6-2834-4e4f-8695-882a2b0cbbde>

[33] Agency for Public Procurement. National Strategy for Public Procurement 2024-2030, Monitoring Report January – June 2025, Tirana, 2025, pg. 35. <https://www.app.gov.al/GetData/DownloadDoc?documentId=53a7e7e9-3ec2-45d8-9913-cc19e4586400>

- The process of Professionalisation of Public Procurement has continued, with three testing sessions conducted between January and June 2025, resulting in 363 participants tested and 293 certified.[34] However, a dedicated online procurement training platform maintained by APP, offering a full curriculum for procurement professionals, is still not in place. While capacity-building activities exist such as workshops, training modules, and testing sessions, the specific recommendation for an APP-managed online platform has not yet been fully implemented publicly. Some of the training modules conducted over the past 10 years are listed on their official website.[35]

Roundtable for Chapter 5 – Public Procurement: Meeting the provisional closing benchmarks within the accession negotiations framework held on June 10th, 2025

- Recommendation no. 4 that “civil society should have a more prominent role and greater recognition for the contribution it provides” is not fully addressed. Among a list of collaborators in the Annual Report 2024, one civil society organization (namely EMA) is listed as such in holding roundtables under the Partnership Platform for European Integration.[36] However, the role of civil society actors as key stakeholders should be more prominently recognised and highlighted.
- Recommendation no. 5, which calls for stronger collaboration with civil society actors, also requires greater attention and further action. The 2024 annual report and the monitoring reports of the national strategy mention civil society participation in an awareness-raising activity titled “Integrity and Risk Elements Throughout Public Procurement Procedures – Open Data in Corruption Prevention.”[37] APP also took part in the plenary session of the National Convention on European Integration on December 19, 2024, which included a dedicated panel on Public Procurement organised by the European Movement in Albania.[38] However, civil society actors should be given a more prominent role and clearer recognition for their contribution.

• [34] Agency for Public Procurement. National Strategy for Public Procurement 2024-2030, Monitoring Report January – June 2025, Tirana, 2025, pg. 7. <https://www.app.gov.al/GetData/DownloadDoc?documentId=53a7e7e9-3ec2-45d8-9913-cc19e4586400>

• [36] <https://www.app.gov.al/t%C3%AB-tjera/trajnime/trajnime/> (accessed on 03.10.2025)

• [37] Agency for Public Procurement. Annual Report 2024 “Achievements – Priorities 2025”, pg. 219., <https://www.app.gov.al/GetData/DownloadDoc?documentId=4a9ddc1c-a89f-4862-afc4-d4884a3a2102>

• [38] Agency for Public Procurement. National Strategy for Public Procurement 2024-2030, Monitoring Report January – December 2024, Tirana, 2025, pg. 35. <https://www.app.gov.al/GetData/DownloadDoc?documentId=605f49e6-2834-4e4f-8695-882a2b0cbbde>

• [39] Agency for Public Procurement. Annual Report 2024 “Achievements – Priorities 2025”, pg. 219., <https://www.app.gov.al/GetData/DownloadDoc?documentId=4a9ddc1c-a89f-4862-afc4-d4884a3a2102>

CONCLUSIONS

Albania has made notable advances in aligning its national legal and institutional frameworks with the EU acquis, particularly in the areas of public procurement, judicial reform, and justice, freedom, and security, as reflected in Chapters 5, 23, and 24. These efforts demonstrate the country's commitment to harmonizing its policies with EU standards and reflect important steps toward creating effective, transparent, and accountable governance structures. In the area of public procurement, Albania has strengthened its legislative and institutional frameworks, implemented electronic procurement systems, and enhanced oversight mechanisms, contributing to greater transparency and competitiveness. Nonetheless, challenges remain, particularly in preventing corruption, ensuring integrity in contract awards, and fostering equal opportunities for all economic operators. Full alignment requires further efforts to safeguard procurement processes from political interference and to improve administrative capacity at all levels.

Chapter 23 continues to represent one of the most demanding aspects of Albania's EU accession agenda. The chapter covers judicial independence, anti-corruption measures, and the protection of fundamental rights, which remain sensitive areas. Political influence in judicial appointments and disciplinary procedures, coupled with the need to secure the autonomy of key anti-corruption institutions such as the Special Prosecution Office, continues to be a concern. Furthermore, safeguarding fundamental rights, including freedom of expression, minority rights, and the right to fair trial, remains central to Albania's compliance with EU expectations. Sustained reforms in this chapter are critical not only for EU accession but also for reinforcing public trust in the rule of law and consolidating democratic institutions.

Chapter 24, which addresses justice, freedom, and security, highlights Albania's progress in strengthening law enforcement capacities, improving border management, combating organized crime, and enhancing migration and asylum procedures. While these improvements are commendable, organized crime networks, drug trafficking, and human trafficking persist as major challenges, requiring consistent and targeted interventions. Albania has also advanced in adopting policies to align with the Common European Asylum System; however, limitations in institutional capacity and the management of migration flows remain areas for further development. Ensuring humane and efficient processing of asylum claims, alongside robust coordination across relevant agencies, is a key priority.

Overall, this book provides an in-depth analysis and strategic guidance for addressing the critical areas identified in Chapters 5, 23, and 24. By implementing the recommendations outlined herein, policymakers, legal experts, civil society actors, and academics can support Albania in consolidating institutional capacities, enhancing transparency and accountability, and addressing persistent gaps in governance. These efforts are essential not only for Albania's successful integration into the EU but also for strengthening public trust, promoting socio-economic development, and fostering a resilient and effective governance system capable of meeting the challenges of EU membership.